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The Military Career of William Booth Taliaferro, April 1861-February 1863

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THE MILITARY CAREER OF WILLIAM BOOTH TALIAFERRO

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APRIL 1861 - FEBRUARY 1863

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Robert Charles Bolander

August 1964

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APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to trace the military career in Virginia of Brigadier General William B. Taliaferro, C. S. A. The available biographical sketches of Taliaferro are inadequate, especially those concerning his military career. There is disagreement over whether or not Taliaferro was ever promoted to Major-General. And if he did receive his commission, why was it not until the end of the war? Was it because he was incompetent? If he was competent, then why was his promotion so long in coming? And why was he passed over for promotion when he was the senior officer in his division? What was it that made him transfer to another theatre of war?

Each of these questions posed a problem. Taliaferro had been a leader in the ante-bellum Virginia politics and society. Following the war, he again played an influential role in Virginia. Was it possible that such an individual would prove incompetent as a military leader? Perhaps! Research would have to provide the answers. And it did.

This paper examines Virginia's command resources at the outbreak of hostilities in order to put in proper perspective the professional opportunities a man of Taliaferro's experience could reasonably anticipate. Following this is a detailed narrative of Taliaferro's action during his months of service in Virginia. The conclusion is favorable to Taliaferro. On the whole, he appears as a competent field commander. Only an earlier conflict with his commanding general caused Taliaferro to be passed over for promotion in January, 1863. His promotion finally comes, but it is in the closing hours of the war.

The conclusion is that Taliaferro, although not brilliant, was as able a commander as most of those who held the rank of major general.

THE MILITARY CAREER OF WILLIAM BOOTH TALIAFERRO

APRIL 1861.- FEBRUARY 1863

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROBLEMS OF CONFEDERATE COMMAND RESOURCES

When Virginia seceded from the Union April 17, 1861, she possessed a substantial volunteer military organization. Her "paper reserve" totaled 143,155 men, the largest reserve in the South and the seventh largest in the old Union. But thousands that were counted as effectives were unfit for military service. Virginia's armed units totaled 12,150 men with 118 infantry companies, forty-two companies of riflemen, sixty-seven troops of cavalry and twelve companies of artillery. Ready volunteers without weapons, about half as numerous as those armed, including twelve additional artillery units which awaited needed ordnance, brought Virginia's total fighting force near 20,000 at her secession.¹

With ample manpower, the state legislature turned to the question of potential leaders. Where were the brigade, divisional, and army commanders to come from? How were competent field officers to be provided?

¹Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants (New York, 1942), I, 701-725. Freeman has done the only survey on the Southern Resources of Command.

There were seventy-five officers on the roster of the regular United States army; nineteen were colonels, nineteen lieutenant colonels, and thirty-seven majors. The regular army staff was composed of ten colonels, ten lieutenant colonels and fifty-one majors--making a grand total of 146 officers plus the four generals. The average age of the generals was sixty-eight, of the colonels sixty-seven. Despite the static condition of the regular army's officers, it was assumed by the Virginians that their sons were younger, more able, and vastly superior to their counterparts in the North and that they would go with their state.

Winfield Scott, commander of the Army, was a Virginian, as was Joseph E. Johnston, Quartermaster General, with the staff rank of brigadier general. Six colonels of the line were Virginians: John Garland, Thomas T. Fauntleroy, Matthew M. Payne, Philip St. George ^{Cooke} Cooke, Washington Seawell, and Robert E. Lee. Only ^{Cooke} Cooke and Lee were graduates of the United States Military Academy. Two lieutenant colonels, both West Pointers, were Virginians: John Bankhead Magruder and George E. Lay. Other Virginians holding commissions in the regular army were: ten majors, staff and line, seven of whom were West Point graduates, twenty-three captains, twenty being West Pointers; of thirty-one lieutenants, twenty-three were West Point graduates; and of the ten second lieutenants, all but two had graduated from the Military Academy. In all, there were

eighty-four regular officers from Virginia, sixty-four of whom had gone to West Point.

Virginia's second source of leadership material was the graduates of West Point who had served in the regular Army and had resigned their commissions prior to Virginia's secession. In all, there were twenty-two such men who were natives of Virginia. Some of the more prominent men in this category included Thomas B. Randolph, age sixty-nine, residing in Missouri in 1861, and Walter Gwynn, an experienced engineer, specializing in railroad and bridge construction. Others who deserve attention were the Reverend W. N. Pendleton, William B. Magruder, head of a Kentucky girls' school, and Professor Thomas J. Jackson who had earned a distinguished record in the Mexican War.

Those officers who had participated in the Mexican War constituted Virginia's third source of officer material. The number of these veterans, not already included in any other category, totaled at least ninety-four. Arthur C. Cummings, Virginia Military Institute, lawyer, colonel in Virginia's militia, and William B. Taliaferro, Gloucester planter and lawyer, two men of distinction, had been breveted as majors during the Mexican War.

Virginia Military Institute, operating in Lexington since 1839 under the direction of its Superintendent Francis H. Smith--a member of the Governor's Advisory Council--was to provide an invaluable

source of potential leaders. Much of the discipline and a large part of the professional training of the United States Military Academy had been copied by V. M. I. In the words of one of its historians, it provided "a liberal education, coupled with a military training, in belief that its graduates would prove valuable citizens, all the more useful because capable of bearing arms efficiently in the hour of their country's need."² In 1861, V. M. I. had 433 living graduates and 645 non-graduates. Most of them resided in Virginia and constituted an immediate and indispensable officer reserve corps.

Virginia could also hope to draw upon the rest of the South for its officers. The rest of the South possessed 184 living graduates of West Point, only eighty more than Virginia herself. Furthermore, thirty-six officers from other states, who were not West Pointers, were listed on the Army Register. Among the more distinguished were Brigadier General D. E. Twiggs who had surrendered the Texas forts to the Confederacy, Colonel A. S. Johnston, a brevet brigadier general, and Brigadier General W. S. Harney of Louisiana, who had already declared for the Union. Colonel Samuel Cooper, a native New Yorker tied to the South through marriage, was to become adjutant and inspector general for the Confederacy. Major Braxton Bragg, a breveted lieutenant colonel, Captain P. G. T. Beauregard,

²Ibid., p. 708.

already a brigadier general for the Confederacy, W. W. Loring, formerly a United States colonel, and Lieutenant Colonel W. J. Hardee, a recognized tactician, were all to become familiar figures. Majors Earl Van Dorn and E. Kirby Smith, who were to have important roles in the coming western campaigns, and James Longstreet, former Army paymaster destined to play a leading role with the Army of Northern Virginia, all resigned their commissions to serve the Confederacy. A few other majors, relatively unknown, and a considerable number of captains, old for their grade because of the smallness of the United States Army, also resigned to serve the South.

These men were already busy training recruits in the deep South. Virginia could expect very few, if any at all, to assist in organizing her troops. Neither could she expect to get officers from the existing or defunct military schools in the other Southern states. The Citadel was to render service to South Carolina similar to V. M. I.'s contributions to Virginia. But Virginia could count on her sister states for support in battle when the invaders came.

From all sources, Virginia could count a maximum of 625 men with military training or experience. Exclusive of V. M. I.'s contribution, the total was not more than 200. The pertinent question was whether they all would support the Confederate cause.

Scott was unyielding in his allegiance to the Union. Lee,

although deploring secession, remained firmly for Virginia. Major George H. Thomas of Lee's former regiment remained loyal to the Union. Joseph E. Johnston, with staff rank of brigadier general, resigned to join the Confederacy. Philip St. George ^{Cooke} declared his first allegiance was to the Union and not to Virginia, but his son-in-law, J. E. B. Stuart, was to fight for the Confederacy. Colonel Thomas Fauntleroy, at the age of sixty-five, sided with the Confederacy. Of the other thirteen field officers, five were for Virginia: John Bankhead Magruder, Robert Hall Chilton, Robert S. Garnett, Henry Hill, and Albert J. Smith. Nine of the twenty active general and field officers born in Virginia were to defend her. Forty-seven of the sixty-four active company officers appointed to the United States Army from Virginia were to fight for her. And of the seventeen officers who had resigned prior to 1861, thirteen sided with the Confederacy. One active officer and three of those who had resigned did not participate on either side.

The response of the Mexican War veterans was a bit disappointing because of their age. Out of ninety-four potential commanders, twenty-five were to enlist in the service of the South. Some excellent officers were forthcoming--James L. Kemper, William B. Taliaferro, Montgomery D. Corse, and David A. Weistiger immediately volunteered and received commissions.

The response of the V. M. I. graduates was excellent. Within

three months of Virginia's secession, one third of the field officers of Virginia's volunteer regiments and two thirds of the "provisional" regiments of the state were V. M. I. men. By 1862 they were furnishing one third of the regimental leaders. Eighty-two per cent of the school's total graduates (1,781 of 1,902) from 1839 to 1865 were to serve in the Confederate Army.

Other individuals--sons of Virginia by birth and by choice, but appointed to the Academy from other states--were to serve Virginia. Captain George E. Pickett, born in Richmond but appointed to West Point from Illinois, joined the South. Major Daniel Ruggles of Massachusetts, West Point class of 1833, was married to a Southerner and chose to fight for the South. Brevet Major John C. Pemberton of Pennsylvania resigned as a captain of artillery in the regular army because of Southern principles. Major Benjamin Huger, a brevet colonel in the South Carolina volunteers, was to play a major role in the early Virginia campaigns.

Despite the numerous resignations from the regular army and despite the high caliber of the leaders she was enlisting, Virginia felt humiliated. Virginia had the highest percentage of officers in the United States Army which refused to recognize secession. Thirty per cent of the West Point graduates from Virginia declared for the North compared to a ten per cent average throughout the rest of the South. Only eighteen of twenty-nine regular commissioned officers

from Virginia declared for the South; twenty-seven of thirty-four commissioned officers from the rest of the South declared for the Confederacy. There are two reasons for this relatively stronger pro-Union sentiment in Virginia. A deeper cleavage over the issue of secession existed in Virginia. Furthermore, as one of the Union's oldest and most populous states, she had continually supplied a large quota of officers to the Army, many of whom, growing up within the Union as a whole, had lost touch with Virginia herself. Most of those who retained close ties with her sided with her.

On April 18, 1861, before it was known what most of these men would do, the Virginia Convention authorized the Governor to muster into service as many volunteer troops as necessary to repel any invasion, and to appoint Virginia's general, field, and staff officers. Under Virginia law, the volunteers elected their company officers; the Governor and his council appointed the field officers. Virginia law differed slightly from the policy of the Confederate government: If the volunteers were offered as battalions or regiments, they could elect their own field officers if their state law permitted. President Jefferson Davis could appoint majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels only to unattached units, which had been formed into regiments; otherwise, all positions were to be filled by elections. The political rationale of this unwise system was that the volunteers constituted state militia mustered into Confederate service. Under the permanent

Constitution, the appointment of militia officers for battalion, regimental, and company commands was reserved to the individual states. All commissions in the regular army of the Confederacy were by presidential appointment, although in established regiments, all vacancies below the rank of brigadier general were to be "filled by promotion according to seniority."

The Virginia Convention on the day that it voted for secession, also authorized the Governor to organize sufficient volunteers to stop an enemy invasion and to appoint the necessary field commanders. Talliaferro, now a major general of the militia, was given temporary command of Norfolk. Kenton Harpor, another major general in the militia, was sent to Harper's Ferry. Philip St. George Cooke ^{Cooke} was commissioned brigadier general and ordered to assume direction of affairs in Alexandria. Major Daniel Ruggles was assigned to Fredericksburg as brigadier general of the Volunteers. On April 23, Lee, with the rank of major general, took command of all Virginia forces. J. E. Johnston, also a major general of the Volunteers, declined the command of the Richmond forces and its defenses for the reason that Virginia's military organization was known to be temporary. But because swift organization was necessary for defense of the state, other officers accepted their commissions immediately. They were willing to risk losing their state commissions, receiving a lower Confederate rank, or having to serve under a Confederate

officer whom they outranked when Virginia's Volunteer System was integrated into the regular Confederate Army.

Soon regiments from other states began arriving. Almost immediately friction arose between Virginia and Confederate authorities. To alleviate this Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker in formal orders gave Lee, as Virginia commander, temporary control of all Confederate forces within the state. But even Lee's best efforts could not control the rivalries and ambitions of all the officers. Impatience and bickering seemed to dominate all considerations. Then on May 23, the Virginia voters overwhelmingly approved the ordinance of secession. Virginia's troops became part of the Confederate military organization.

The Confederacy had fewer than 1500 trained officers available for service. West Pointers, graduates and non-graduates alike, totaled less than 300. Graduates and non-graduates of the various state military schools totaled approximately 700. Veteran officers of other wars numbered some 300.³ But that was all. There were only 1500 trained officers to command some 650,000 volunteers. If Virginia expected to utilize her entire manpower, which included 250,000 more who had been turned away for lack of arms, she would have to secure

³Robert R. Ellis, "The Confederate Infantry Officer," Infantry Journal, LXIV-LXV (1949), 17.

additional officers. At least 25,000 general officers of all arms and services would be needed.

Planters, lawyers, bishops, and professional soldiers all volunteered their services. The professionals emphasized the need for military experience and education; the non-professionals contended that the ability to carry arms and to command were as readily the gift of gentlemen as the acquired knowledge of soldiers.⁴ Yet only individuals with military training and experience could evaluate the complex factors of training, tactics, logistics and administration which affected each of the many commands.⁵ Altogether these factors created a more complex situation in which the role of staff planning became more and more vital. Both President Davis and Secretary of War Walker realized this. As far as possible infantry brigade and division commands went to West Pointers. Furthermore, attempts were made to insure that no officers from state service accepted rank above the grade of colonel unless the above requirements were met.⁶

Politicians fumed. As far as they were concerned North Carolina troops would be commanded by a North Carolina general appointed by

⁴Ibid.

⁵T. N. and C. G. Dupuy, The Compact History of the Civil War (New York, 1962), p. 118.

"the Confederate Infantry Officer,"
⁶Ellis, p. 17.

the North Carolina governor; the Confederate authorities in Richmond would just have to accept it.⁷ Jefferson Davis, who had his own definite ideas about army command, was to work in this atmosphere of states' rights.

As wartime president of a country in revolt, Davis faced many problems. The blockade problem was largely the result of Union naval superiority; the continual conflicts with the various state governors were the product of states' rights; the problem with his military commanders was too often the result of personality clashes. Frank Vandiver comments that, fiercely loyal to his friends, Davis would never forgive or forget an enemy.⁸ Perhaps with less military experience Davis would have been more charitable about the shortcomings of inexperienced and less able subordinates. But he could not bring himself to trust others with military trivia.⁹ He believed himself a competent field commander, but his strategic thinking was often limited in scope. After a while he could not see much beyond the confines of Richmond and Lee's department.¹⁰ Above all, he

⁷Ibid., p. 18.

⁸Frank Vandiver, Rebel Brass: The Confederate Command System (Baton Rouge, 1956), p. 28.

⁹Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 25-26.

would tolerate no mediocrity in the Army of Northern Virginia.¹¹

Davis believed himself a member of the military profession, and supported the professionals' desire for a well organized, professional fighting machine. Perhaps the professionals were too critical, as some of the civilians--John B. Gordon, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Joseph Kershaw, William Mahone--proved to be fine officers.¹² But Davis was ready to fight the state governors, who supported political appointees, on this point.

Despite the continual conflicts and quarrels, by late May it appeared that the Confederacy had sufficient men and commanders available and enough material resources (for a short war at least) to assure victory. The only concern was making certain the men and war material were at the right places at the right times. The efforts of the administration took place in an atmosphere of confidence and certainty--certainty that once General P. G. T. Beauregard's grand plan had brought the Yankees to battle, the war would soon be over.

Although the administration in Richmond was painfully aware of the limited number of qualified leaders for any long struggle, they were confident in the ability of those available to perform the initial

¹¹Ibid., p. 31.

¹²Ellis, *"The Confederate Infantry Officer"* p. 18.

tasks efficiently. Southerners were confident that they were a race born to lead, superior to their brothers in the North.¹³ As a result, they took few pains to train the junior infantry officers and the non-commissioned officers. This was to prove a fatal weakness of the Confederate armies.¹⁴ The Confederate administration and the South in general expected those men, qualified except for experience, to develop their potential qualities in battle. The school of battle, however, simply did not graduate enough suitable officers to match the casualties.¹⁵ All too often, men with high reputations and personal followings proved disappointing in the heat of battle. Boastful men who covered up failures, those ambitious for success for personal gain, physical cowards, and blunderers with a love for battle often emerged instead of another Richard Stoddert Ewell, Thomas J. Jackson, Richard H. Anderson, or Robert E. Lee.¹⁶

Lee personified the qualities of command: A sense of duty, a sense of honesty and justice, moral and physical courage, a sense of humor, and a high moral character--all strengthened through

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

superior professional ability.¹⁷ Perhaps many of the Southern leaders did possess all of these qualities except the professional ability; perhaps with a military education gained through actual experience, these men would provide the necessary officer reserve. William Booth Taliaferro was one of the Southern leaders who lacked professional military training. He, too, would need battle experience to develop into a qualified officer.

Taliaferro exemplified the "typical" Southern gentleman of the ante bellum period.¹⁸ Born in 1822 of well-to-do Tidewater parents, he graduated from William and Mary in 1842 and then attended Harvard Law School. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he organized a company of recruits from Gloucester County and left for Vera Cruz. Taliaferro was enchanted with his experiences and romanticized them in his diary and letters.¹⁹ Despite youth and its

¹⁷ The Officer's Guide (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1943), p. 515.

¹⁸ Biographical sketches of Taliaferro: C. A. Evans, ed., Confederate Military History (Atlanta, 1899), III, 670. Ezra J. Warner, Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders (Baton Rouge, 1959), pp. 297-298. Allen Johnson, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1928), XVIII, 283-284.

¹⁹ Diary of William B. Taliaferro, U. S. A., Gloucester, Virginia, 1847, "On Voyage with Troops to Mexican War" and letters from William B. Taliaferro--Mexican War, 1847-1848, William Booth Taliaferro Papers, College of William and Mary Library, Williamsburg, Virginia. All Taliaferro Papers are from the manuscript collection at the College of William and Mary, unless otherwise noted.

sentiments, he performed his duties well and returned home with the rank of brevet major. In the ensuing years he continued his law practice and engaged in politics, representing his county in the Virginia House of Delegates.

His next taste of military life came in 1859 when the governor ordered him to Charlestown, Virginia, following John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Taliaferro, now a major general of the militia, took advantage of the incident to revamp the state's volunteer militia system and drill the troops in preparation for greater events. He sensed that armed conflict had become inevitable, and in his memoirs states that he

had been active before the war in preparation for the event which I had expected, and had endeavored to excite a military spirit in the people, and seized hold of the absurd and visionary but cruel attempt of John Brown at Harper's Ferry as an opportunity to organize our volunteer system. I was placed in command of the troops sent by the Governor of Virginia, Governor Wise, to Charlestown to prevent a rescue and made the most of my opportunity--I never suffered anything so silly as a rescue or an attempt to liberate that fanatic, but I organized, drilled and instructed the troops amounting from time to time to some thousands which were placed under my command, and prepared them to some extent for the great drama in which they were so soon to act.²⁰

After the election of Lincoln, Taliaferro became an open advocate of secession:

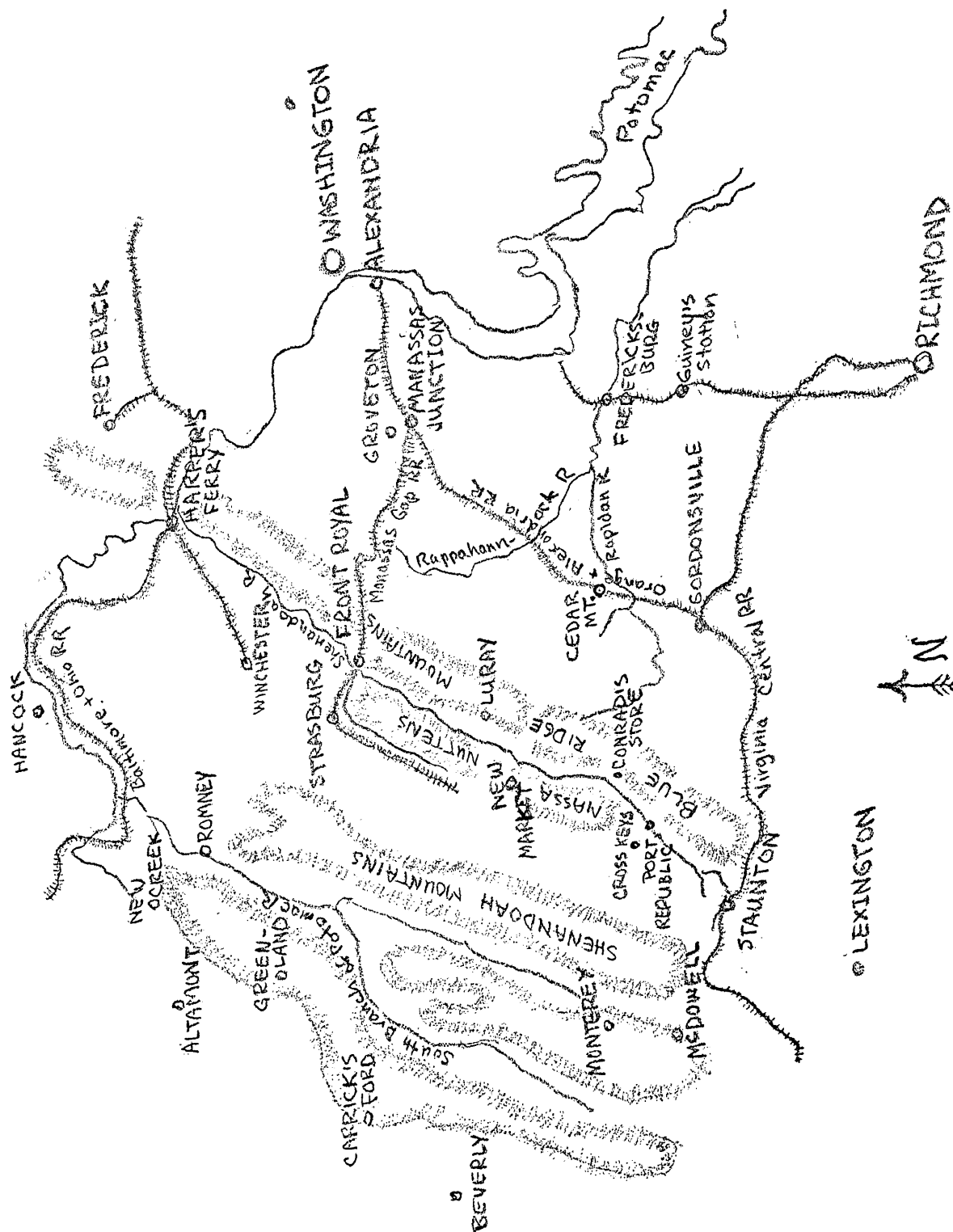
²⁰ Taliaferro's manuscript recollections of the war, through 1861 only, Taliaferro Papers.

I was an ardent advocate for secession. I was a firm believer in the institution of slavery. I thought it was of divine origin and enjoined upon us for the mutual benefit of the white and negro races. I honestly believed to oppose the institution of slavery was infidelity to the Christian religion. I saw the bright side of the institution, the bright side for the slaves and the bright side for their masters. I lived in a society refined and elevated by its influences among slaves whom I believed to be happy and contented, and I thought it a crime to destroy, a crime to limit and not to extend a political and social condition which produced so much happiness to both races and so much independence of character and refinement and virtue to the dominant race. I believed the rights of the people of the Southern States under the Constitution were invaded and violated by the efforts of Northern politicians to circumscribe the area of slavery--and that the South could better protect herself under an independent government and push the institution into Mexico or beyond.²¹

Deeply devoted to the cause of the Confederacy, Taliaferro possessed the other necessary qualifications to help lead the Confederacy. He was typical of the non-professional men on whom the Confederacy had to rely to fill its positions of command. His personal background-- Gloucester planter, lawyer, and politician--and his military experience as brevet major in the Mexican War and ranking Major-General of the state militia, recommended him highly as a person of ability. The South expected of Taliaferro what she expected of others: that actual military experience would fully develop his capabilities.

²¹Ibid.

Theatre of Operations - Army of Northern Virginia



CHAPTER II

FUTILE CAMPAIGNS AND A TEDIOUS MARCH

Major General William B. Taliaferro was the highest ranking officer of the Virginia militia during that tense month of April, 1861, while his state pondered secession. On April 18, 1861, when Virginia seceded, Taliaferro was ordered to Norfolk to organize and assume command of the forces which were to be concentrated at that point. When the Virginia convention adopted the volunteer system, he applied for a commission. On May 3, he was appointed to the rank of Colonel of Volunteers in the Provisional Army of Virginia, and directed to take over the post and troops at Gloucester Point, opposite Yorktown, and protect the York River passage.¹

Taliaferro accepted, on May 6, 1861, his commission as colonel of the Gloucester militia. Lee instructed him to push forward the battery on Gloucester Point as far as possible.²

¹Robert N. Scott (ed. under direction of Secretary of War), The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1900), Series I, II, 800. (Hereafter referred to as Official Records. Unless otherwise noted all Official Records notations are from Series I.)

²Ibid., p. 831.

Taliaferro complied with the orders, and with the help of John Page of the Navy, installed two nine-inch guns at the water battery. By May 11, he had 185 infantry and ninety artillerymen under his command. Two more nine-inch guns had just arrived, and they, too, were scheduled for rapid installation.³ Taliaferro, having made the necessary preliminary arrangements, began establishing his position on a more permanent basis by May 14. He requested the necessary authority to secure houses for needed hospital facilities and officer quarters. Lee, who disliked the idea of subjecting private houses to military needs, refused Taliaferro's first request. In addition, Taliaferro requested additional troops, perhaps from the militia of neighboring King and Queen County.⁴ This request was approved, and Taliaferro was also given the use of the troops from neighboring Mathews County.⁵

There was little excitement or action during Taliaferro's tenure in May. He continued to secure his position on the York River but was unable to obtain sufficient forces and equipment to construct any suitable rear defenses.⁶ The only incident occurred on May 14.

³Ibid., p. 834.

⁴Ibid., pp. 843-844.

⁵Ibid., p. 857.

⁶Ibid., p. 859.

when a Federal gunboat appeared at the mouth of the river. But the Federals were merely sounding the mouth of the channel and made no attempt to force their way up the river.⁷

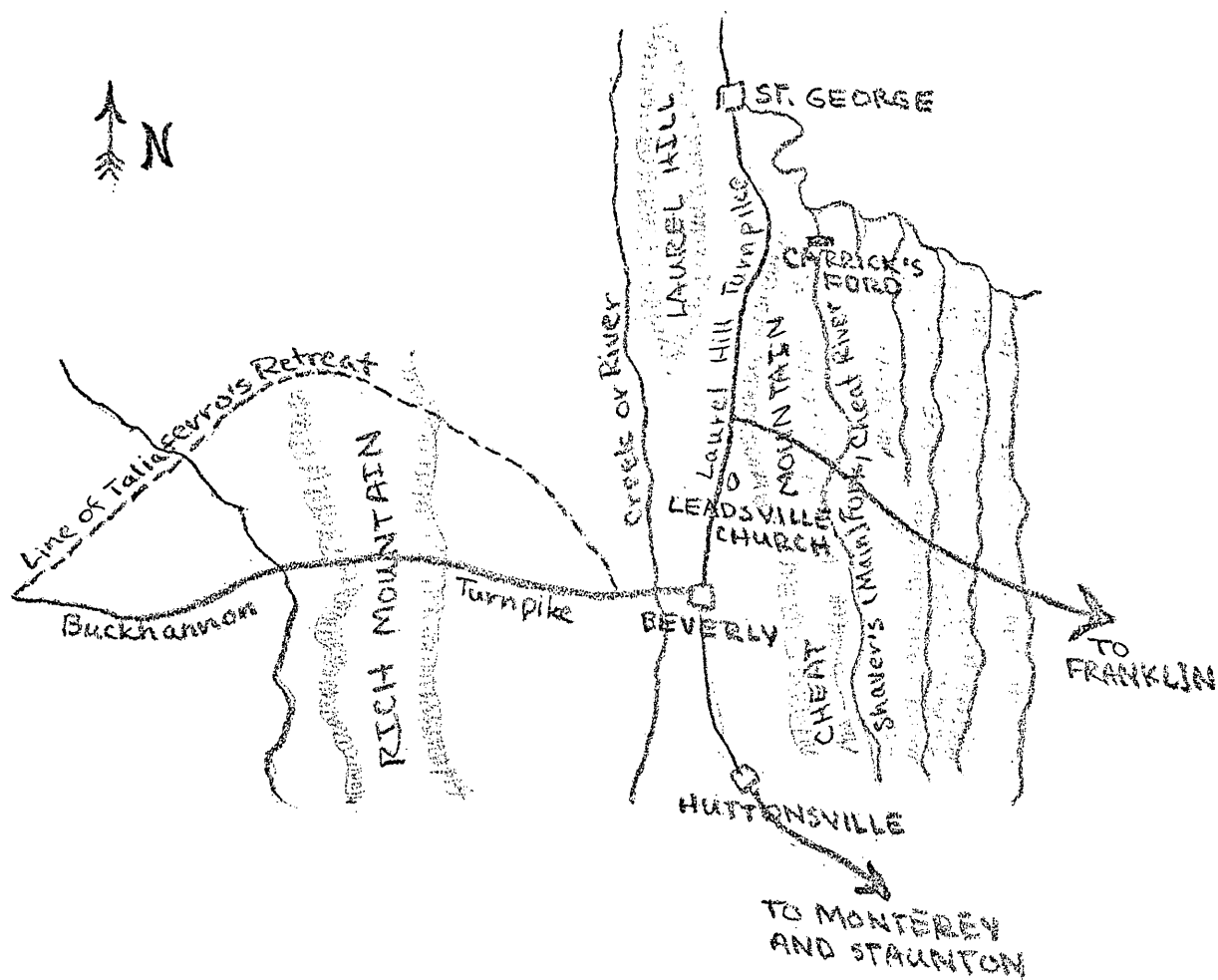
He was replaced at the end of May and ordered to Richmond.⁸ There he assumed command of the Twenty-Third Virginia Infantry, and on June 7 left for the campaign in western Virginia. Taliaferro and his regiment took the railroad to Staunton and then marched 120 miles to Brigadier General Robert S. Garnett's camp at Laurel Hill.⁹ The campaign was intended to prevent the Federals under Major General George B. McClellan's direction from securing the exposed link of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad between Washington and Parkersburg. The Federals could not bind together the East and Midwest unless they could freely operate this railroad without threats of raids. It was the duty of the Confederate force under Garnett to prevent the enemy from penetrating to Beverly, the junction of the Staunton-Parkersburg stage road and the turnpike to Grafton.¹⁰ By holding Beverly, the Confederates would be able to continually harass

⁷Ibid., p. 844.

⁸Ibid., p. 876.

⁹Letter to Lt. Garnett Andrews from William B. Taliaferro, Greenbrier River, August 29, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

¹⁰Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 23-24.



General sketch of region of Rich Mountain Campaign, July, 1861.
 (Sources: Official Records II, 274. Lee's Lieutenants, I, 26.)

the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Taliaferro's regiment was with the force which formed the advance guard at Buckhannon Gap some eight miles west of Beverly. On July 7 pickets reported a large force of the enemy under the direction of McClellan, advancing toward their position. It was Major General W. S. Rosecrans, McClellan's ablest subordinate, with about 8,000 men. Garnett ordered Colonel James N. Ramsay's First Georgia Infantry to hold the enemy. The Confederates met them on the wooded hill to the right of the camp and drove them back. Later that day Taliaferro's Twenty-Third Virginia Regiment relieved the Georgia troops at their position on the hill. Taliaferro successfully held the position until nightfall with minor casualties--one killed and two wounded.¹¹

That night his regiment was relieved by Colonel Samuel V. Fulkerson's Thirty-Seventh Virginia who held until the next morning. Then, in the morning, the First Georgia relieved the Thirty-Seventh. About two o'clock that afternoon, July 8, the Thirty-Seventh relieved the First Georgia with instructions to hold until nightfall when the Twenty-Third would relieve them. As Taliaferro's men approached the hill, a party of the enemy made a dash for their

¹¹Memoranda of events connected with General Garnett's command from 7th to 9th of July inclusive (n. d.). (Hereafter referred to as July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.)

position. The result was mass confusion. Part of the Thirty-Seventh had already begun retiring as some of the Twenty-Third began marching up. There was general, unorganized firing from all sides downhill toward the enemy. Scattered as it was, the firing repelled the attack with considerable loss to the enemy.¹²

When Garnett learned of the situation he sent Colonel William E. Starke forward to try to rectify the position of the troops. After a general consultation, Starke ordered that the hill be abandoned. With only 4,000 men, Garnett realized he could not hold the numerically superior forces of the enemy for any length of time. Taliaferro's Twenty-Third withdrew, and by 10:30 that night was posted on another hill some 300 to 400 yards to the rear.¹³ Throughout the night the enemy continued to shell the abandoned hill. The next morning the Federals continued shelling toward the camp, but with little success. Taliaferro was able to hold his new position for the next three days with the loss of but one man.¹⁴

On the evening of July 11, Garnett sent for the colonels commanding regiments. They were informed that the Federals had succeeded in enveloping the Confederate left flank on Rich Mountain

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

and had seized the road and the gap. The Federals were squarely across the Confederate line of retreat, forcing Garnett's men to go over the crest of the mountain and attempt to reach Beverly.¹⁵ The colonels were instructed to pack the baggage of their commands with the utmost quiet and without demoralization. Taliaferro said nothing of a retreat, but told his men they were going to make a detour to catch a "party of Yankees" near St. George.¹⁶

The heavy rain that had begun to fall made marching conditions most difficult. It prevented the meat from being cooked and the men survived on bread for the next two days. Furthermore the rain drenched all the tents and caused the over-loaded wagons to bog down quite frequently. The train was a long time in starting because of the rain and mud. When the march finally did get under way, the First Georgia Infantry Regiment of Colonel Ramsay was in front, followed by Taliaferro's Twenty-Third Virginia, the wagon train, Colonel H. R. Jackson's Thirty-Fourth Virginia, the battery, with Fulkerson's Thirty-Seventh bringing up the rear.¹⁷

About sunrise on July 12, after having successfully and uneventfully crossed the mountain, the entire command was within

¹⁵Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 29-31.

¹⁶July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

¹⁷Ibid.

four miles of Beverly. The command halted, and after a few minutes' rest each regiment turned to the rear, reversing the order of march. The entire command then took the right hand road at Leedville and marched forward on that turnpike toward St. George. Near Leedville, Lieutenant Colonel George W. Hansborough's battalion and one company of cavalry joined the command.¹⁸ It was Garnett's intention to march through the Cheat Mountains towards Hardy County and make his way to Brigadier General Edward Johnson's command. After having gone several miles on the road, the column halted about eleven o'clock. A battalion of infantry with a company of cavalry was posted at this point.¹⁹ After resting, the column moved on to New Interest where it turned off to the right on an exceedingly bad country road going directly toward Cheat Mountain. The ensuing march was quite tedious. At sunset the First Georgia continued forward while Taliaferro's Twenty-Third Virginia with the battery remained in the rear. Several hours later the command came for them to advance. Taliaferro relates "they led us to believe the wagons had succeeded in crossing the mountains."²⁰ But such was not the case. And

¹⁸Letter to Brigadier General H. R. Jackson from William B. Taliaferro, Monterey, July 25, 1861. Memoranda of events connected with General Garnett's retreat, Taliaferro Papers.

¹⁹July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

²⁰Ibid.

the difficulties that had faced the wagon train multiplied as they struggled to get the artillery over the mountains in pitch darkness, rain, and ankle-deep mud. Only through the "extraordinary exertion" of several of his officers, says Taliaferro, were they able to accomplish this difficult task.²¹

By sunrise the morning of July 13, the Twenty-Third had advanced to within a mile of the wagon trains. Garnett's whole command was once again put into motion, observing the marching order of the preceding day. This meant that Taliaferro's Twenty-Third Virginia regiment and Ramsay's First Georgia regiment would again be the rear guard.²² The command proceeded down the steep side of Cheat Mountain and crossed Shaver's (Main) Fork of the Cheat River at Kaler's Ford. On the opposite side of the river, the road turned left and followed the river bank. A meadow ran along between the river and the road to where the road again crossed the river at Carrick's Ford.²³

Garnett continued his retreat over the muddy road. Nothing but ford after ford lay ahead. And worse news: before a wagon had

²¹Letter to Brigadier General H. R. Jackson from William B. Taliaferro, Monterey, August 10, 1861. Report of Battle of Carrick's Ford, July 13, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

²²July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

²³Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 34.

crossed Kaler's Ford, cavalry scouts reported the enemy closing in on the rear of the column.²⁴ Garnett's adjutant selected a system of retiring upon eligible defensive positions. Ramsay's First Georgia was to form across the meadow and hold the enemy until the wagon train had crossed the river; then it was to retire behind Taliaferro's Twenty-Third Virginia. Then Ramsay's regiment was to form a line behind Taliaferro's so that the latter could retire behind it and reform behind the Georgians. This system of holding position after position for over three miles to Carrick's Ford enabled the wagon trains to escape without any serious attack on the forces and without loss of men or wagons.²⁵ At Carrick's Ford the crossing was difficult because of the swiftness and depth of the river and the numerous stalled wagons, causing several wagons to be abandoned.²⁶

Taliaferro was ordered to occupy the high bank on the right of the ford with his regiment and a section of artillery.²⁷ At first the uniforms of the Federals appeared identical to those of the confederates, and the approaching columns were mistaken for

²⁴Report of Battle of Carrick's Ford, July 13, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

²⁷Report of Battle of Carrick's Ford, July 13, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

Ramsay's Georgians. The mistake was soon discovered, and Taliaferro's men, all except Company A whose strength had been depleted by sickness and fatigue, opened up with a fierce barrage.²⁸ Together with the artillery's destructive fire, Taliaferro's infantry was able to keep the Federals from crossing the river. Finally when nearly every cartridge had been expended, Taliaferro ordered the regiment to retire.²⁹

Although there were thirty dead and wounded, the men retired down the hill in perfect order. After marching almost half a mile, the Twenty-Third approached another ford. Here they met Colonel Starke who directed them to move on and overtake the main body of Garnett's force. On crossing the ford, Taliaferro met Garnett who instructed Taliaferro to detail ten good riflemen to act as skirmishers behind some fallen trees.³⁰ Taliaferro sent an entire company, but since there was not adequate protection, all but ten were ordered back. He posted three more companies on the high bluff overlooking the river, but discovering the undergrowth to be too thick, they soon came back to the regiment. Starke, acting

²⁸July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

²⁹Report of Battle of Carrick's Ford, July 13, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

³⁰Ibid.

under Garnett's orders, told Taliaferro's men to march off and overtake the main body.³¹

As this part of his regiment marched off to the sounds of skirmishing to their rear, Taliaferro received the news that Garnett had been killed. The entire regiment now pushed on as rapidly as possible for another two miles, crossed Parson's Ford, and shortly overtook the main body of troops.³² The other commands were drawn up in good order and anxious to resist the enemy.³³

However, the question of command had to be settled first. Colonel Ramsay of the First Georgia was the ranking officer, but he had gone ahead with his regiment. A messenger was sent to overtake him; the question was what to do in the meantime. General Garnett's aides suggested their present position was adequate to make a stand. Taliaferro objected. For one thing, the enemy artillery had taken its toll on his regiment's morale. Furthermore, the artillery had gone ahead and Taliaferro advised against making a stand without it. He was certain there were defensible positions ahead and suggested the artillery halt and the infantry fall back.³⁴

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

³⁴Ibid.

His suggestion was followed and the commands began to move forward. Taliaferro reformed the Twenty-Third--which was in disorder after the long retreat--on the march. Having no orders from Colonel Ramsay, they continued to march, resting at periodic intervals. Presently the messenger returned. He had instructions from Colonel Ramsay which again put Taliaferro in command of the rear. It was Taliaferro's duty to continue to defend the train and to check the Federals at every eligible position. To this order Taliaferro remarked, "does Colonel Ramsay wish to throw the whole responsibility of the retreat on me? If so I would like to have more force in the rear which is to be attacked and is in great danger."³⁵ The messenger however stated that there appeared to be greater danger in front and therefore the largest force was required there.

Taliaferro made do with what he had; he placed Jackson's Thirty-Fourth in the lead, then Hansborough's battalion, then the Twenty-Third, with Fulkerson's Thirty-Seventh in the rear. His request for a company of cavalry to blockade the road in the rear was never granted. The troops continued up Horseshoe Run, marching without a halt through the gathering dusk. The rear was "greatly embarrassed" by the presence of ordnance wagons. Most of the ordnance wagons, lightened by dumping excess baggage, had managed

³⁵Ibid.

to keep up with the advance. Three wagons remained with the rear, and it was impossible to move these forward with any speed, as the teams had broken down. A request was sent to Colonel Ramsay to move forward more slowly; his reply was that the wagons should be abandoned if they hindered Talliaferro's movements too much.³⁶

After nightfall, Talliaferro's messengers could no longer keep contact with the advance, which was miles ahead. The situation was quite perilous--if the enemy should strike the rear, the advance was too far to lend support; if the enemy were in front, the rear could offer no aid, for the same reason. Talliaferro's command continued to march through the night in this hazardous fashion. Only by the use of lights were they able to discern which road the advance had taken at the numerous forks.³⁷

At daylight on July 14, the forces under Talliaferro reached the Red House in Maryland on the Northwest Turnpike near Altamont. Here they finally caught up with the advance. After halting a short time, the reunited command continued their march on the turnpike with Talliaferro's Twenty-Third leading the way. A large force of Federals was nearby, but they did not attack the Confederates.³⁸

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Report of Battle of Carrick's Ford, July 13, 1861, Talliaferro Papers.

The command then halted on the north branch of the Potomac before crossing back into Virginia. They continued their march on the road to a point called Neville where they took a branch to Moonfield. They advanced along this branch to a point called Greenland, a Union settlement very hostile to the Southern cause. About eleven p. m. the column finally halted. Colonel Ramsay, sick, turned the command over to Taliaferro.³⁹

Ignorant of the area, Taliaferro quickly reconnoitered. He discovered that the road ran through the mountains for miles and was commanded by high ground on both sides. This meant the enemy could endanger the entire command if it were already in front of Taliaferro's forces. Furthermore, his troops were only thirteen miles from the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad via a good turnpike from New Creek. This caused Taliaferro anxiety, for he knew the Federals occupied this point and could easily and quickly increase their numbers if the occasion necessitated.⁴⁰

At this time Taliaferro fortunately overtook the cavalry, which was immediately ordered out as pickets. All the roads leading to the camp were picketed with an extra large force placed on the turnpike toward New Creek. Taliaferro's next endeavor was to procure needed

³⁹July 1861 Memoranda, Taliaferro Papers.

⁴⁰Ibid.

food for the command.⁴¹ After long, weary marches the tattered and exhausted troops finally reached Monterey.⁴²

Brigadier General Garnett's death, the humiliation of 700 casualties (excluding Taliaferro's command) and the abandonment of the western approaches to the Shenandoah Valley were equally mourned by the South.⁴³ Even worse was the "panic terror" which seized much of the South. The July 19 edition of the Richmond Examiner insisted that the effects of the disaster would be limited and that it was the officers of General Garnett's command that were the real sufferers--"their reputation is torn to pieces by the tongue of rumor." The Richmond Dispatch on the same day attributed the disaster "in great part to faulty generalship" although believing the main reason was the "treachery on the part of the natives who guided the march of the invader."⁴⁴

It was in this atmosphere that Taliaferro was called upon to explain the condition of his command. This unfortunate incident was sparked by a letter from Captain A. V. Scott of Taliaferro's brigade deploring the disorganized condition of Taliaferro's command.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 36.

⁴³Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁴Ibid., note, p. 36.

Taliaferro was not informed of the letter for almost a month. Referring to its contents, Taliaferro agreed that Scott's contention about the condition of the regiment was correct but denied that the regiment had ever "become completely disorganized."⁴⁵ Despite the trying circumstances the regiment still maintained discipline. Taliaferro attached a note from Scott to his report saying that Scott had never intended to convey the impression that the regiment had lost all semblance of discipline.⁴⁶

In his report, Taliaferro then went into a lengthy description of the condition of the regiment. The aggregate total had been reduced from 659 to 544 by August 29, when Taliaferro wrote from Greenbrier River, where his command had been stationed awaiting further orders. There were sixteen deaths, twenty discharges, one transfer, sixteen killed in action, and a total of sixty-two left either sick at Laurel Hill, wounded, taken prisoner on the march, or missing. Of the 544, 322 were present with 291 fit for duty. The other 222, nearly all of whom were sick, had been left at McDowell and Monterey. Leaves of absence had been given to a few upon certification of the medical director that they would die if they stayed in the field.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Letter to Lt. Garnett Andrews from William B. Taliaferro, Greenbrier River, August 29, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

He followed up with a list of the causes that had operated to prostrate his regiment. When the regiment had left Richmond in June it had been badly equipped and lacked sufficient tents. Upon reaching Laurel Hill, his men had been under severe duty both day and night, constantly creating a "posture of defense." The distance from an adequate supply base was great and foraging parties were necessary daily to procure food from the surrounding countryside. Also contributing to their prostrated condition was the continual contact with the Federals: numerous night patrols were sent out to waylay the enemy, the guard and picket duties were severe due to continual Federal firing, and heavy skirmishing occurred day and night. Furthermore, many of the men slept in the trenches without protection from the rain. On top of all this, a measles epidemic had broken out.

Therefore, by the time the orders to march were given on July 11, the men were already in poor condition. That night and all the next day they were on the move with only a few hours of rest. After reaching the main camp just outside of Beverly there was a brief halt and then the march got underway again with the Twenty-Third still acting as the rear guard, now with the assistance of the First Georgia. Upon crossing Cheat Mountain, the column faced ford after ford. It was the duty of the rear guard to resist the enemy long enough to allow the wagon train to escape. Then at Carrick's

Ford, the Twenty-Third alone engaged the enemy while the rest of the troops were resting. They were then ordered to overtake the main body, a task that called for a march of four miles, the crossing of another ford and engaging the enemy in the process. The Twenty-Third continued to guard the rear on the march to Red House, and marched all night again many miles into Virginia.⁴⁸

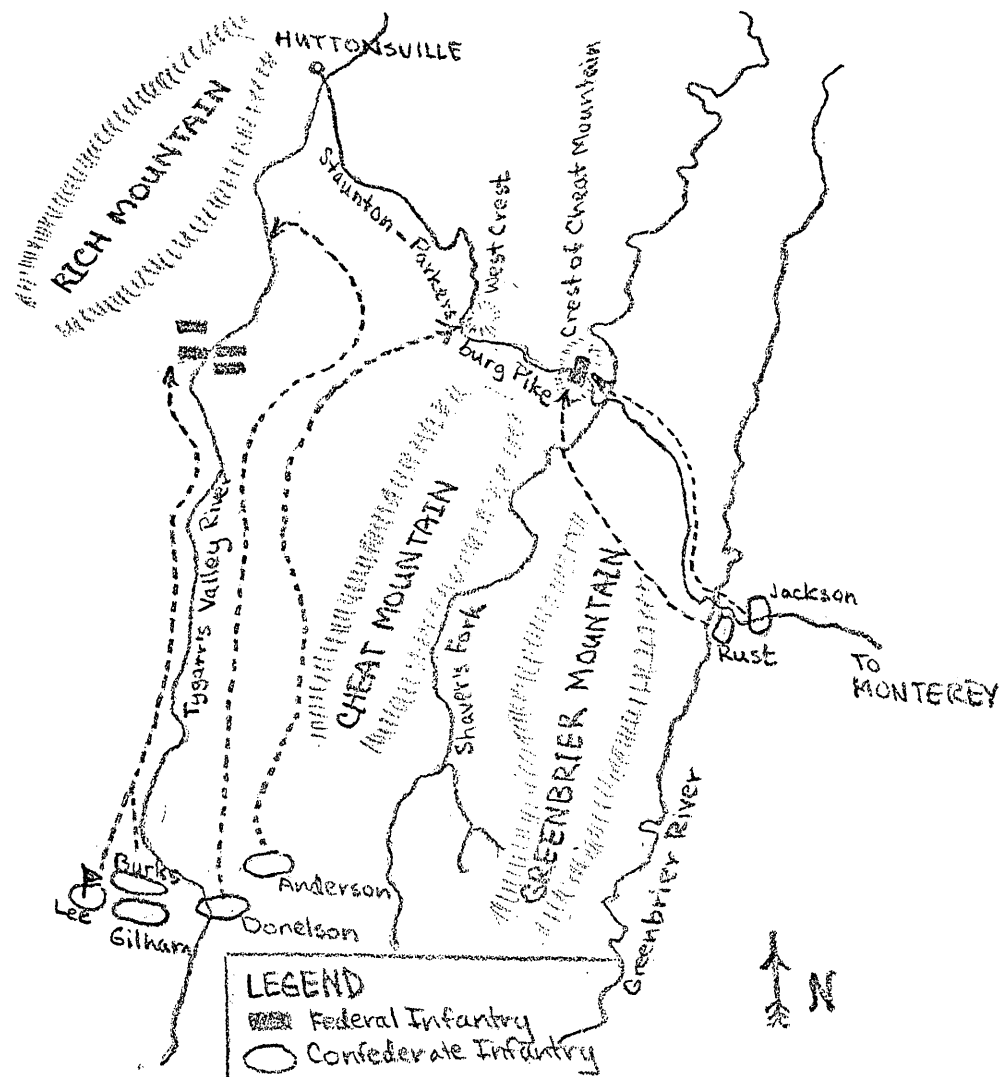
By the time his command had reached Monterey, the men had finally succumbed to the mental and physical sufferings they had endured. Taliaferro was confident, he said, that although his regiment had seen the hardest service of all in Garnett's Army, the removal to the East would produce the needed, beneficial moral effect on his men.⁴⁹ Already, two weeks before he was asked to defend its condition, he had asked that he be given independent command of his regiment.⁵⁰ He had been reluctant to serve directly under Colonel Ramsay; now, August 29, he asked for a transfer. His transfer was to come, but not before his regiment had undergone another campaign.

On September 9, Brigadier General H. R. Jackson informed

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Letter to Brigadier General H. R. Jackson from William B. Taliaferro, August 13, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.



Region of Cheat Mountain Campaign, September 9-12, 1861.
 (Source: R. E. Lee, I, 563.) Greenbrier Camp of Taliaferro's troops in vicinity of where Staunton-Parkersburg Pike crossed Greenbrier River.

Taliaferro that the Twenty-Third and Fulkerson's Thirty-Seventh had been detailed to accompany Colonel Albert Rust's Third Arkansas to Brigadier General W. W. Loring's headquarters. They were to co-operate with Loring's command under Lee's guidance. Lee had been sent out from Richmond. It was hoped that he could recoup the losses the Confederates had suffered in western Virginia. The objective was to surprise and assault the Federal position on Cheat Mountain. Colonel Rust had been assigned to command the expedition. Although it was necessary to waive rank, Taliaferro, knowing little of the terrain or enemy positions, declared he would happily entrust himself to Rust's leadership.⁵¹

Rust had personally reconnoitered the area. He had discovered that a column could make its way along the western ridges of Cheat Mountain to a point two miles west of its crest and directly on the road which supplied the Federal forces on top of the mountain. The Federals had only some trenches and a blockhouse at this point which could be taken easily. From this lofty position an assault could easily be made on the Federal flank which was exposed. By

⁵¹William B. Taliaferro, Memorandum of occurrences and a march of two forces under Colonel Rust, Third Arkansas, to Cheat Mountain, 9, 10, 11, 12 September, 1861, written from camp at Greenbrier River, Taliaferro Papers. (Hereafter referred to as Greenbrier Memorandum, Taliaferro Papers.)

the time Taliaferro arrived, the offensive plan was worked out.⁵²

Taliaferro remarked that he was concerned that the enemy would have strong entrenchments guarding the Federal rear, but was reassured by Rust that this was not the case.⁵³

Taliaferro's regiment awaited daybreak on the tenth with the rest of the force at Hevener's on the Greenbank Road. The column went into the woods at the point, ascended "the back Alleghany," forded the Greenbrier River and mounted the first top of Cheat Mountain about dark. Dawn of the eleventh came, and the force began its descent down the mountain along a creek which led into Cheat River. At the point where the creek intersected the river, Rust assembled his field officers and explained the plan of attack. The column was to assault the enemy camp through the woods which protected it. To get into position to do so, they would first have to march to the Staunton turnpike. At this point, Hansborough with this command of 100 men was to assault the small Federal force up the turnpike on the left. Taliaferro was to take his men, go up the road a short distance, turn right and get between the woods and the Federal position. Rust, with his men and the remainder of Jackson's command, was to move up the road to White's house. Thus, with simultaneous attacks, the forces would

⁵²Freeman, R. E. Lee, I, 560-562.

⁵³Greenbrier Memorandum, Taliaferro Papers.

assail the Federal encampment in the rear and on the left flank. By nightfall the forces were within a mile and a half of the enemy's camp. There they halted for the night.⁵⁴

Meanwhile the other Confederate forces, operating under Loring's command, had carried out their parts in Lee's plan. Samuel Read Anderson was where he could reach the Staunton-Parkersburg turnpike in a rush in order to prevent any reinforcements being dispatched to Cheat Mountain. Donelson's men occupied a position where they could support either Anderson or Loring. Loring's troops had marched down the valley close to the enemy. If all worked well the enemy would be driven down Tygart's Valley; with Anderson's forces poised to strike and Donelson's ready to pursue, victory could yet be achieved in this rugged western Virginia area.⁵⁵ The key was Rust on the eastern side of the mountain. Would he be successful?

Rust's men, exhausted by the rain, cold and rugged terrain of the previous day, were ready to move by two o'clock on the morning of the tenth. Darkness and dense underbrush prevented them from moving until sunrise. Then, leaving behind their blankets, overcoats, and haversacks, they marched to the turnpike where they surprised and captured the enemy picket guard. Examination of the

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Freeman, R. E. Lee, I, 562-566.

prisoners showed that Rush's plan was worthless. There were Federal defenses in the rear. A musketproof blockhouse at the bend of the road and four pieces of artillery clearly commanded the road. These were supported by two regiments, one on each side of the road, which were protected by log works. However, there were no works for a short space on the south side of the encampment.⁵⁶

A new plan was devised. The command would move in two lines to the south side. From that point they would attempt an attack by penetrating within the enemy encampment. The forces moved back to the turnpike with their captured wagons and prisoners and began their attempt to approach the enemy from the south. Although greatly hampered by dense brush the troops pushed to within a short distance of the Federals. A party was sent forward to reconnoiter. They reported that any assault would be sheer madness as the Federals were also strongly protected by earthworks at this point.⁵⁷ The officers decided, without a dissenting vote, to return to camp. They did not venture to meet Anderson who had penetrated to Staunton Road below. Instead the troops returned over the same trail as far as Cheat River. The next morning they resumed their march back to camp, arriving early that afternoon.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Greenbrier Memorandum, Tallaferro Papers.

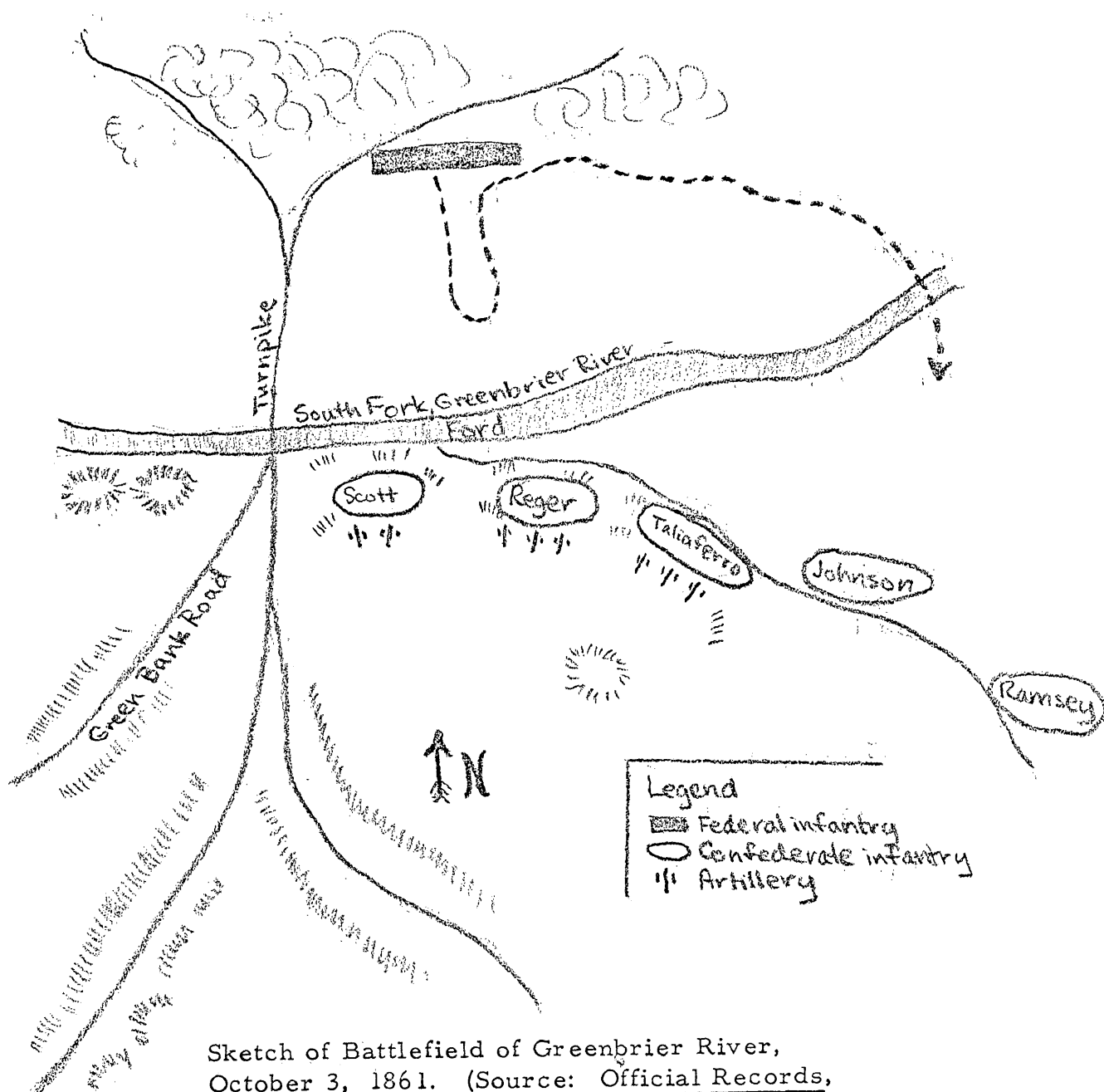
⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

In the meanwhile Lee waited for word from Rust. Nothing in the way of musket volleys had been heard from Rust who was supposed to have opened the offensive on the morning of September 12. By noon all expectations of the morning had vanished. Lee's plan could not be executed in any essential. There was still no word from Rust on the morning of September 13. Lee still hoped to hold his position in Tygart's Valley and find another route to the Federal's rear. Later in the day he was informed of what had happened east of Cheat Mountain. It was now apparent that nothing could be accomplished on the west side either and the rest of the troops were also ordered to fall back to their original positions.⁵⁹

Taliaferro's men proceeded to camp again at Greenbrier River after the abortive attempt on Cheat Mountain. On October 3, a large force of enemy infantry approached their encampment. Dispositions of the Confederate forces were immediately undertaken. Taliaferro was now acting brigadier for the Twenty-Third and Forty-Fourth Virginia Infantry and a battalion of the Twenty-Fifth Virginia. He ordered his troops to occupy the trenches defending the front approach. He ordered the artillery to a position commanding the turnpike and meadow to the front and left of the Confederate position. The pickets gallantly resisted the oncoming Federals, but slowly

⁵⁹Freeman, R. E. Lee, I, 567-571.



retired against overwhelming odds. Part of the Federals came off the turnpike and began marching across the river flat; the rest occupied the hills to the right of the road.⁶⁰ A heavy artillery exchange followed immediately. Most of the Federal fire was concentrated on the more exposed positions held by Talliaferro.⁶¹

The intense Confederate barrage forced the enemy to fall back out of range. The Federals then tried to turn the Confederate left flank. Part of their forces advanced to a point opposite the center of Talliaferro's position under fire from the Confederate troops on the right. Once in position, they began marching downhill to the meadow with the intention of assaulting Talliaferro's works. Preparatory to their assault, they opened fire on the Confederates with their long-range muskets. But the effective Confederate artillery and coolness and gallantry of Talliaferro's troops soon threw the Federals into confusion and retreat. After some time still under heavy fire, they managed to reform, regain the turnpike, and with their batteries withdrew. The Confederate loss was quite small compared to the heavy losses of the Federals. Talliaferro's command suffered only six casualties, two killed and four wounded.⁶² Talliaferro, himself,

⁶⁰Official Records, V, 231.

⁶¹Ibid., V, 226.

⁶²Ibid., V, 231-232.

was praised by H. R. Jackson, the commanding general, for the cool skill and energy displayed under fire.⁶³

For four months Taliaferro had effectively performed his limited duties in a series of futile Confederate campaigns in western Virginia. Under battle conditions he was proving himself a capable leader. He felt that his services merited a transfer to an area where he could develop his potential more fully. Finally his request for a transfer was granted. Taliaferro would soon be seeing service in northern Virginia under Thomas J. Jackson.

⁶³Ibid., V, 228.

CHAPTER III

AN INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING UNDER JACKSON

By December 9, 1861, Taliaferro had arrived with his brigade at Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's camp at Winchester, Virginia. In October, Jackson had been assigned to command the Shenandoah Valley District in the Department of Northern Virginia. On November 5, Jackson had established his headquarters at Winchester where he began improving the condition of his scanty forces. By the middle of November he had formulated a plan for an advance on Romney.¹ For this venture he needed additional troops. Loring's troops were sent to supplement the forces of Jackson. But the command of these new troops was to remain separate, under the continued direction of Loring, as the Army of the Northwest.²

Jackson wanted his forces to move against the Federal communications along the Potomac. His purpose was to destroy the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal by blowing up several dams around Hancock, Maryland, and to disrupt the east-west Baltimore and

¹Official Records, V, 389, 913, 937, 965, 988-989.

²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 122-123.

Ohio Railroad service by damaging several sections of track.

Taliaferro's brigade was to play an important role in Jackson's campaign.³ Under cover of several demonstrations made against various Federal positions along the Potomac east of their objective, advanced troops concentrated near Dam Five on December 17. Four days later they had successfully breached it, disrupting the canal. On January 1, the main force moved northward from Winchester. The two columns united and on January 4, drove the Federal forces from Bath. Jackson's men proceeded to cross the Potomac, bombarded Hancock, and then, receiving no support, withdrew toward Romney on the 7th.⁴

Snow and sleet had been falling for several days and the roads were next to impassable for the artillery and cavalry. Not until January 14 did Jackson's advance guard, Taliaferro's brigade, reach its destination. The main force arrived at Romney the next day. Fortunately for the men, who were already beginning to suffer from the numerous hardships incurred through two weeks of continued exposure to the harsh elements of winter, the Federals once again

³ Taliaferro's brigade consisted of the Twenty-Third and Thirty-Seventh Virginia, the Third Arkansas, and the First Georgia.

⁴ Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders (New York, 1884-1887), II, 282; Official Records, V, 389.

offered no resistance.

Jackson could not resist the temptation to pursue his enemy. He would take his "Stonewall Brigade" under Garnett and Taliaferro's brigade and press the Federals back across the Potomac. If this could be achieved, he could disrupt the Federal communications over a wider area by destroying several Baltimore and Ohio bridges across the Potomac and Patterson's Creek.⁵ But Taliaferro's brigade was diminished in size and all but demoralized because of fatigue, sickness and casualties. It was in no condition for active operations.

In a letter dated January 20, to J. P. Benjamin, Secretary of War, Jackson admitted that all of Loring's brigades were in poor condition, but that he was confident their condition would be greatly improved in a few days. Jackson was confident they would be able to hold this important position provided the troops were given adequate winter quarters.⁶ Determined to hold Romney, he proceeded to station Taliaferro and the rest of Loring's command there and returned Garnett's troops to Winchester. This arrangement was made because Jackson believed that "Garnett's experienced and fast

⁵ Frank E. Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall (New York, 1957), pp. 188-189.

⁶ Official Records, V, 395, 1039.

marching regiments could . . . move more quickly than Loring's troops to any threatened part of the district."⁷ The logic of this assumption of Jackson was strengthened by the fact that some of Loring's troops were relatively inexperienced and slow in marching which had prevented Jackson from moving as swiftly as he had desired during the campaign.⁸

Regardless of Jackson's reasoning, the men of Loring's command were dissatisfied. When Jackson took his "Stonewall Brigade" back to the comforts of Winchester, they viewed this last move merely as another act of favoritism shown toward his "pet lambs."⁹ Perhaps it was this act that finally broke that proverbial "camel's back." His troops had nearly exhausted themselves in their struggle against the Federals and the unrelenting harsh elements of nature. Talliaferro describes the conditions under which his men existed during the campaign:

. . . there was neither tent nor camp equipage. No house was there, hardly a tree. The weather was intense, and a hard, crisp snow sheeted the landscape. It is a fact that the enemy literally snowballed us, for the missiles from their guns scattered the hard snow and hurled the fragments upon us, almost as uncomfortable to us as the splinters from their shells. Days and nights we were without shelter of any kind. One officer

⁷Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 123.

⁸Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall, p. 188.

⁹Letter to Holmes Conrad from William B. Talliaferro, July 11, 1877, Talliaferro Papers.

sent his servant back for his campbed, and the next morning, covered with snow, it was an antique tomb, with the effigy of an ancient knight carved upon it. Fortunately for us, the fences of that country were not all of stone and knew how to burn.¹⁰

Under such conditions it is understandable that Jackson's men and officers grew more and more discontented with their service under him. Jackson himself was apparently unconscious of either cold or suffering. His attitude is clearly revealed in his official report when, admitting the lack of tents and other essentials, he states that the men, except for part of Loring's command, "bore up under these hardships, with the fortitude becoming patriotic soldiers."¹¹

Jackson's officers lacked his zeal. Neither the campaign nor the logic behind it had impressed them. To them, the entire march had been nothing short of madness. Now they were isolated in Romney. They were bound and determined to have their troops removed from their desolate outpost to the comforts of Winchester. Discontent soon manifested itself in the form of letters to several politicians in Richmond complaining of the conditions prevailing at Romney.

¹⁰"Personal Reminiscences of Stonewall Jackson" by William B. Taliaferro, (unpublished manuscript) Taliaferro Papers. This is Taliaferro's description of the conditions of the march itself, but things were no better at their camp at Romney.

¹¹Official Records, V, 395-396.

Colonel Fulkerson of Taliaferro's brigade initiated the controversy with his report of the conditions at Romney. He sent his letter, with Loring's approval, to Walter R. Staples, a prominent Virginia politician in the Confederate Congress, who was directed to see that it was delivered to the addressee--President Davis.¹² On January 23, Taliaferro also wrote to Staples, a longtime friend of the Taliaferro family, in reference to Fulkerson's letter. Taliaferro observed that it was truly unfortunate that the strength of the best army he had ever seen had been destroyed by "bad marches and bad management." At this time, he also recommended the immediate withdrawal of the troops or "we will not [have] a man of this army for the spring campaign."¹³ Two days later a petition deploring the condition of the army at Romney was formally presented to Loring. It was signed by eleven officers of his command--Colonel Taliaferro's name headed the list. The petition complained of the severe degree of "hardship, toil, exposure, and suffering that [found] no parallel in the prosecution of the present war" undergone by their men during the previous eight months. By the first of December the troops were already exhausted, the report continues, but instead of camping for the winter, they were ordered to Winchester where they subsequently

¹²Ibid., pp. 1040-1041.

¹³Ibid., p. 1042.

participated in the Romney campaign. On this expedition the men faced numerous "toilsome marches" and spent night after night without tents, blankets or even axes to cut wood, in the "coldest period of a cold climate." Their present encampment was on "wet, spouty land" which was nothing more than a sheet of water when it rained. Furthermore their location was precariously near the Federal position on the B. & O. Railroad. The report concludes that ". . . your army could be maintained much more comfortably and at much less expense and with every military advantage at almost any other place."¹⁴

Loring, agreeing that this report reflected the true condition of his troops, forwarded the petition to Richmond. Desiring that the case be clearly presented, he asked Taliaferro, who was just going on leave, to take a copy of the petition to Richmond and personally hand it to the President. Irregular as the procedure was, Taliaferro complied, and worse yet, President Davis accepted the copy from him. Davis proceeded to pull out a map and had Taliaferro explain the entire situation. As Taliaferro later recalled, Davis said that Jackson had committed a mistake and immediately ordered reconcentration of the forces at Winchester.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1046.

¹⁵Letter to Holmes Conrad from William B. Taliaferro, July 11, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

Jackson immediately, though reluctantly, carried out the order. He also wanted to resign his command and transfer back to V. M. I. ¹⁶ Such a resignation would be detrimental to the Confederate command system; therefore, immediate action was delayed as Governor Letcher of Virginia attempted to persuade Jackson to reconsider. As Jackson waited, he attempted to have Loring sent back to Romney. When this failed, Jackson preferred charges against Loring for neglect of duty and conduct subversive to good military discipline. ¹⁷

Fortunately cooler heads prevailed. Jackson yielded to the argument that his resignation would have a discouraging effect on the morale of the young Confederacy. His letter of resignation was returned to him. Loring was transferred to another theatre of operations, but was not further rebuked. On the contrary, he was promoted to Major General; furthermore, the charges against him were dropped. ¹⁸

The favorable treatment accorded Loring did not please Jackson. Also disconcerting was Loring's request for the promotion of Taliaferro to Brigadier General. ¹⁹ Jackson had been thoroughly

¹⁶Official Records, V, 1053.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 1055-1056.

¹⁸Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 129.

¹⁹Letter to J. P. Benjamin, Secretary of War, from W. W. Loring, February 13, 1862, Taliaferro Papers.

disgusted with all of the political maneuvering behind the scenes during the round-robin affair. He was not likely to forget that Taliaferro had been one of the main agitators in the controversy. Jackson was to retain bitter memories of this affair; his animosity toward Taliaferro would never completely subside. He was justified in his contempt for the manner in which the affair had been handled. The procedure itself was not in accord with military discipline and good order. Taliaferro's attitude was the epitome of the insubordination characteristic of Jackson's officers.

That this was an era in which politicians and other non-professionals played an important, though often blundering, role in military affairs does not alter the fact that such a condition was simply poor military discipline and hampered military efficiency.

Examining the logic of Jackson's campaign itself, Vandiver concludes that Jackson's reasoning was sound.

He [Jackson] hoped to attack Bath, to clear the enemy from that vicinity and from Hancock, Maryland, not far north of Bath, to destroy communications between Federal Generals Banks and Kelley, and to threaten Kelley's rear. Cut off, without news of what was happening around him, Kelley might be driven to evacuate Romney without fighting, or he might be goaded into fighting alone. If he fought alone, Jackson would outnumber him-- a tactic which Jackson always sought to employ.²⁰

Jackson's hopes had been fulfilled. He had driven the Federals

²⁰Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall, p. 188.

from Romney. From this position the Confederates could strike effectively at the east-west communications of the B. & O. Railroad; this was something the South had been trying unsuccessfully to accomplish through many weary campaigns and months of failure in western Virginia. Only one black mark appeared on Jackson's record: the condition of his troops. Before the controversy had ever begun, Jackson had admitted that their morale was low, but expressed his confidence that their condition could be improved. Improvement meant adequate winter housing; adequate housing required the services of a competent engineer, and a good engineer was simply not available.²¹ Despite this, Jackson stubbornly refused to relinquish his gains until ordered to do so. Jackson can be reprimanded for this obstinacy which blurred his vision to the hardships endured by his men. Perhaps, as Talliaferro notes in his *Reminiscences*, the ends accomplished by the Romney campaign do not justify the sacrifices which were made.²² The conditions existing within the army were inexcusable; proper caution should have been used to assure that these conditions did not occur. But Jackson cannot be severely criticized for the logic of his campaign itself. The fact

²¹Official Records, V, 1039.

²²"Personal Reminiscences of Stonewall Jackson" by William B. Talliaferro, Talliaferro Papers.

that the campaign took place in the middle of winter merely emphasizes Jackson's ability to achieve surprise by using the unexpected.

The important thing was that Jackson remained. He was soon busy molding his force into a trim fighting unit. Not that he forgot the incident entirely. It was just that there were more pressing problems. The Federals had planned a three-pronged thrust towards Richmond for the summer of 1862. McClellan would bring 100,000 Federals to the Peninsula; opposing him would be J. E. Johnston with some 55,000 troops. Brigadier General Irvin McDowell would march south to Fredericksburg with some 40,000; opposite him would be Brigadier General Charles W. Field with only a small force of about 2,500. It was their duty to perform reconnaissance service, continually checking McDowell's movements. The third Federal force was to move by way of the Shenandoah Valley. Major General Nathaniel Banks was to move his 15,000 men down the Valley and unite near Staunton with the 15,000 of Major General John C. Fremont. If he could drive Jackson up the Valley, he was to move to Fredericksburg and unite with McDowell. The Confederates under Jackson could expect to have no more than 17,500 men to stop him.

If the three Federal forces could successfully converge on Richmond, they could succeed merely on the strength of their overwhelming numbers. It was Lee's duty to prevent this; Jackson was to play the key role. While the cautious McClellan was delayed in

front of Richmond, Jackson was to dispose of the commands of Fremont and Banks separately, and simultaneously to force McDowell to remain near Fredericksburg by threatening to cut off his communications. If Jackson could accomplish this, Lee was confident that McClellan could be driven away from Richmond's gates, thus thwarting the Federal's grand plan.²³

To do this, Jackson needed reinforcements. He also needed to fill in several vacancies in command. Johnston sent him a new brigadier general: his name was William B. Taliaferro.²⁴ Jackson said nothing of his displeasure to his staff, but to the Adjutant General he vehemently expressed his sentiments.

Through God's blessing my command, though small, is efficient, and I respectfully request its efficiency may not be injured by assigning to it inefficient Officers. Last winter Gen. Taliaferro had charge of a Brigade and he permitted it to become so demoralized that I had to abandon an important enterprise in consequence of the inefficient condition in which he reported his Brigade. Notwithstanding the demoralization condition of his Brigade he left and visited Richmond, thus making a second visit there within two months. His brigade since he left it, has, under other hands, become efficient, and it, as well as the others bids fair to render good service if not placed under incompetent Officers. I attach so much importance to this matter as to induce me to send this communication direct. The same statement will be forwarded through Gen. Johnston.²⁵

²³Freeman, R. E. Lee, II, 8-24.

²⁴Official Records, XII, Part III, 844.

²⁵Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall, p. 212. Letter from Stonewall Jackson dated April 14, 1852--Hotchkiss papers, Library of Congress.

Taliaferro was no more pleased with the prospect of once again serving under Jackson. He undoubtedly felt the chilly atmosphere that must have prevailed at headquarters. Anger got the best of him. He was determined, he later noted,

... to do my duty the best way I could and satisfy [myself] by my conduct of any personal feelings against him, and try to let him judge of me by my subsequent actions.²⁶

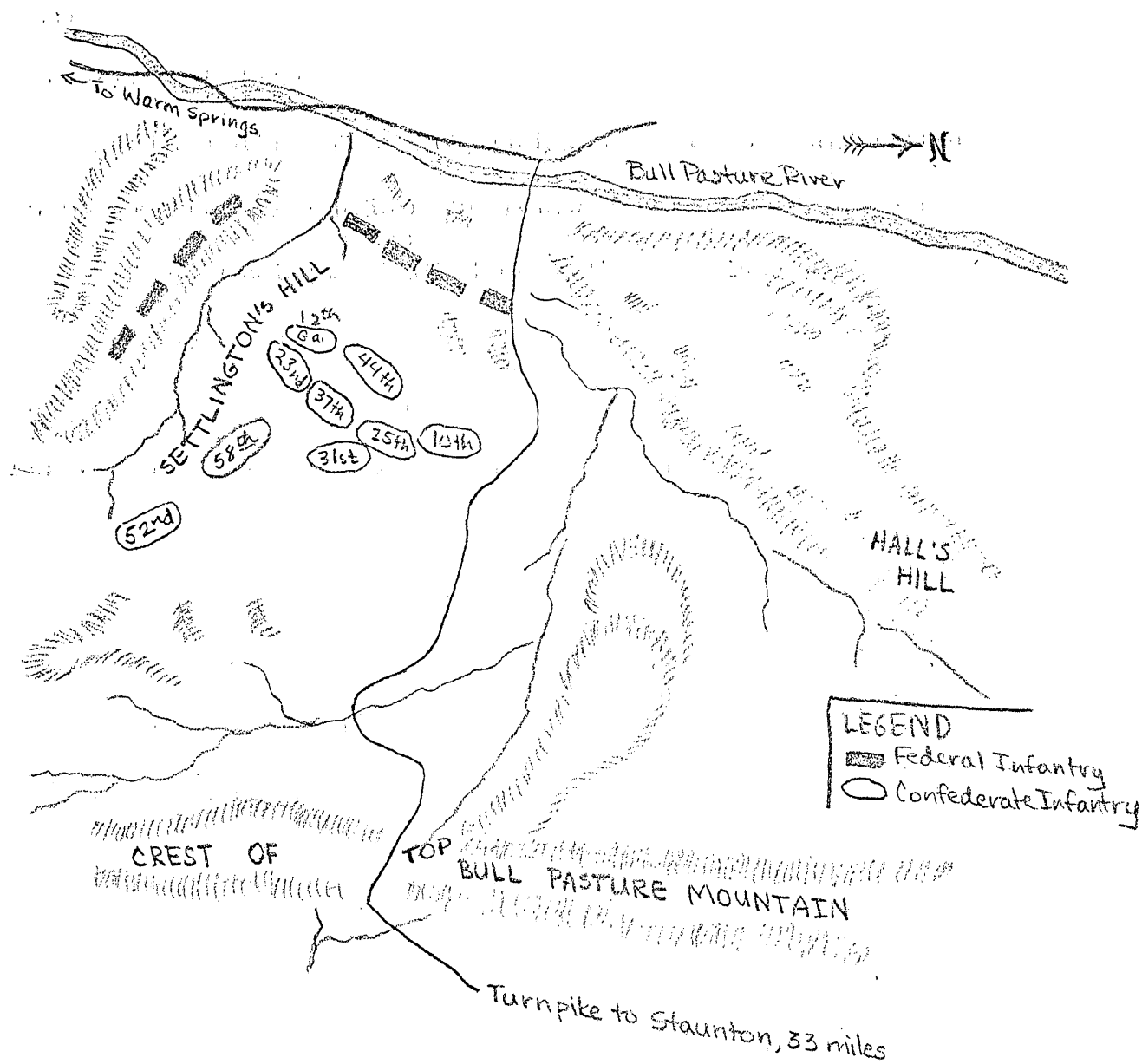
Another unfortunate aspect of the situation was that he was to command Fulkerson's brigade, which was already in capable hands. Taliaferro could have been more effective commanding Burks's brigade, as Burks was on indefinite sick leave. But his orders were to command Fulkerson's, and he complied. And Jackson, after having expressed his dissatisfaction, gave Taliaferro a chance to prove himself. Taliaferro's brigade would be organized into Major-General I. R. Trimble's division.

Jackson decided to eliminate Fremont first. Ewell moved his 8,000 men to Conrad's Store in the Valley, where he would be on Burks's flank should the latter advance on Staunton; Jackson with 7,000 men moved to join Edward Johnson's 3,000 at McDowell. The leading elements of Fremont's force came in contact with Johnson early the morning of May 8. Taliaferro's brigade, in advance of the

²⁶Letter to Holmes Conrad from William B. Taliaferro, July 11, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

Army of the Valley, was ordered to Johnson's aid. Taliaferro moved his brigade up to the rear of Johnson's force. Soon orders came to proceed rapidly to the front. Under heavy fire, the men pressed forward. Stumbling up the rocky trail in the gathering darkness, they finally reached the summit of Bull Run Pasture.

Upon reaching the battlefield, Taliaferro discovered the Federals engaging the Confederate troops to the left and front of his position. Taliaferro quickly ordered the Twenty-Third Virginia Infantry to reinforce and support the position immediately to their front. The Twenty-Third pushed forward, opening up a heavy fire on the enemy to the front and on a spur of a hill just to the right. Meanwhile, Colonel Fulkerson moved his Thirty-Seventh Virginia Infantry toward a wooded hill on the right. It was Taliaferro's intention that the Thirty-Seventh prevent the Federals from turning the Confederate right and drive the enemy from his position on the hill. The troops, eager to do battle, quickly achieved their objective. By now, Taliaferro had called forward the Tenth Virginia Infantry, which had been held in reserve. Four of its companies were ordered to support Johnson's advance on the left, the rest were sent forward to aid the Twenty-Third on its right. The Tenth was subsequently moved farther to the right to prevent any further attempts by the



General sketch of Battle of McDowell. (Source: Official Records, XII, 474.) Taliaferro's regiments are: Taliaferro's Twenty-Third, Fulkerson's Thirty-Seventh, and the Tenth Virginia Regiment. Positions of Confederate forces are relative to final dispositions occupied at time Federals began retiring.

Federals to advance up the valley between the two hills.²⁷

The battle lasted from 4:30 to 8:30 P. M. Every movement of the Federals was promptly met and defeated. In the waning minutes of the conflict Johnson was wounded and Taliaferro took over command. Under instructions from Jackson to hold the hill at all costs, Taliaferro proceeded to make the necessary dispositions.²⁸ Taliaferro stationed several regiments in advance of the main force under cover of the ravines and crevices and advanced his skirmishers. But the conflict was over; the Federals had retreated. By 11 P. M. Jackson ordered Taliaferro to move his men back for relaxation. Johnson personally commended Taliaferro for his gallantry. Taliaferro's efforts to stop the Federal attempt to turn the Confederate right flank, and the discipline and spirit of his men were lauded in Johnson's report.²⁹

Tactically the engagement had not been important. And the 498 Confederate casualties (101 in Taliaferro's command) to only 256 Federal casualties did not reflect any tactical masterpiece.³⁰ But Jackson had successfully stopped one of the two forces converging

²⁷Official Records, XII, Part I, 480-481.

²⁸Evans, ed., Confederate Military History, III, 231.

²⁹Official Records, XII, Part I, 483.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 476, 481-482; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 354.

on Staunton. Now he turned northward to face the other threat.

Jackson left Johnson's forces to protect the southern approach to the Valley, marched up to New Market to join up with Ewell, and crossed over the Massanutten Mountains to Luray. It was the beginning of his famous and brilliant Valley Campaign. From Luray, Jackson marched down the Valley to Front Royal. At Front Royal, on May 23, a small Federal outpost was taken by surprise and driven back. On May 25, Jackson pushed on to Winchester, driving the Federals before him. Occupying that town, he made demonstrations against Harper's Ferry, threatening a possible attack on Washington. Gathering together his captured supplies and ordnances, Jackson hurriedly moved back up the Valley to avoid being snared in a Federal convergence which was rapidly closing upon the Valley in his rear. This campaign stopped Banks and forced McDowell to postpone his march on Richmond. Taliaferro missed the May action after the battle at McDowell because of a short illness.³¹ He did not report for duty until Jackson had begun marching southward from Winchester, slipping down the western side of the Massanuttens between the Union forces. Jackson positioned his forces between Cross Keys and Port

³¹ "Personal Reminiscences of Stonewall Jackson" by William B. Taliaferro, Taliaferro Papers. This is the only source which sheds any light on Taliaferro's whereabouts during Jackson's Valley Campaign. In his Reminiscences, Taliaferro merely mentions that he missed part of the campaign "because of illness."

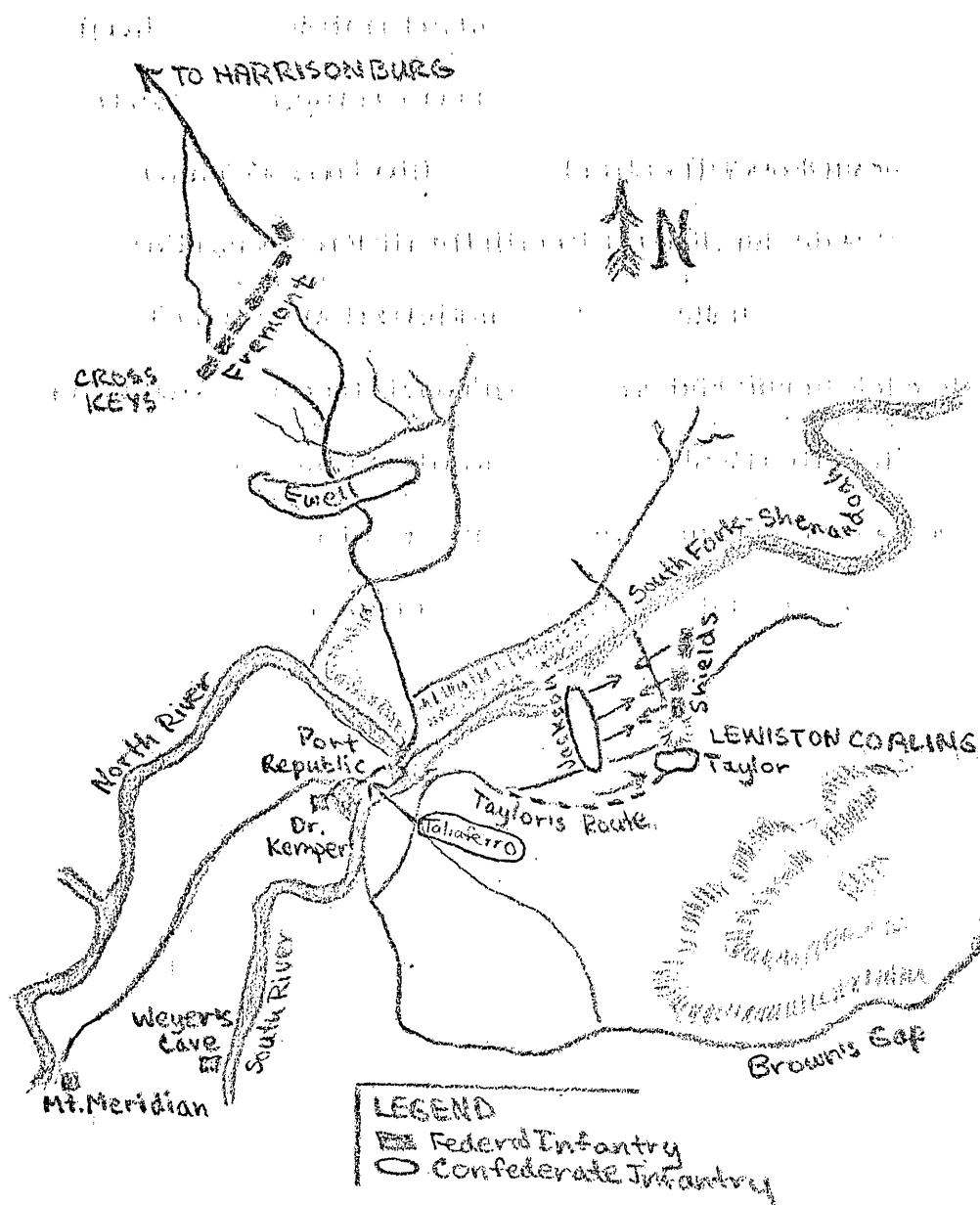
Republic. Once again he hoped to be able to meet the enemy forces individually; thus, outnumbering them, Jackson could again inflict defeat upon them.

Contact was established with the Federals on June 8 around Port Republic. Taliaferro, hearing the gunfire, ordered his regiments formed and moved toward the bridge across the North River leading into town. The Thirty-Seventh Virginia under Colonel Fulkerson was in the advance. Half way to the bridge, Taliaferro met Jackson minus his hat and part of his staff, spurring up the road. Surprised by some Federal cavalry and artillery which had penetrated the town, Jackson and his staff had barely escaped. While Jackson pushed on to forward reinforcements, Taliaferro ordered his brigade forward.³²

The Thirty-Seventh charged the bridge, captured the artillery piece commanding it, and drove the Federals from the village. The Federals escaped by crossing an unprotected upper ford. Taliaferro, believing that the lower ford and the bridge were the only ways into town, did not discover his error until it was too late. In his report, Taliaferro states that "had I known the topography we could have captured most of the enemy."³³ Taliaferro proceeded to occupy the

³²Ibid.

³³Official Records, XII, Part i, 773-774.



General sketch of region around Port Republic. Battles of Cross Keys, June 8, 1862, and Port Republic, June 9, 1862. (Source: Lee's Lieutenants, I, 453.) Taliaferro's Brigade occupied the village of Port Republic during most of the two days' fighting. Called upon to reinforce Jackson in his fight against Shields, Taliaferro followed approximately same route as Taylor. He arrived just as the Federals began to fall back.

town as ordered. The Tenth Virginia was posted in the town; the Twenty-Third was dispatched to protect the fords near the town; and the artillery was placed on a hill to the north of Port Republic where it could command the upper fords. These dispositions gave Taliaferro a good defensive position and, at the same time, prevented him from being cut off from the main body of the army. The next day, June 9, Jackson left Ewell to withdraw slowly and continue to block any further aggression by Fremont, who had been beaten by Ewell the previous day in the Battle of Cross Keys, while he struck out at Major-General James Shields just northeast of Port Republic. Taliaferro, whose brigade was now a part of Major-General I. K. Trimble's division, remained with his troops at Port Republic as ordered. Finding the resistance of Shield's Federals more obstinate than expected, Jackson called for reinforcements from Ewell, and ordered Trimble to evacuate Port Republic, burning the bridges to prevent Fremont from joining Shields. This was done by Trimble, who sent Taliaferro's brigade ahead. By the time Taliaferro's men reached the battlefield, Jackson had been reinforced sufficiently to enable him to turn Shield's left flank. The enemy had begun to retreat. Taliaferro's troops discharged "an effective volley into the ranks of the wavering and retreating enemy"; but this was their only opportunity to take part in the narrow but "glorious" victory.³⁴

³⁴Ibid., pp. 715, 774.

Taliaferro had missed the majority of the battles during the campaign, participating in the opening and closing conflicts. At McDowell he had skillfully moved his troops up to reinforce Johnson and had prevented the Federals from turning the Confederate right flank. After Johnson was wounded, Taliaferro had assumed command, and had continued to thwart the Federal attempts to advance. He had handled his troops competently and continued to do so at Port Republic, although his action for the most part was limited to holding that town. In both conflicts, Taliaferro displayed his competence and gallantry.

Jackson wanted to push back up the Valley after the disordered Federals and threaten the rear of Washington, but Lee could not spare sufficient troops to make it a profitable venture. Lee was facing McClellan, who had driven almost to the outskirts of Richmond. Jackson and his now famous Army of the Valley were called to the environs of Richmond. Lee had made his decision. The result was the Seven Days' Battle, which effectively bottled up McClellan at Harrison's Landing. Taliaferro, once again absent because of illness, was to miss this entire battle.³⁵ He rejoined

³⁵Letter from Mrs. William Booth Taliaferro, dated June 27, 1862. Letter to William B. Taliaferro from James Lyons, dated June 25, 1862, Taliaferro Papers. Taliaferro was in sickbed at the home of one of his relatives; the cause of his illness is not mentioned.

Jackson's command in July, just in time to participate in Lee's next offensive thrust, which was designed to clear Virginia of the Federal troops.

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS FROM CEDAR MOUNTAIN TO FREDERICKSBURG

Lee's offensive thrust to the north, after driving McClellan away from Richmond in the Seven Days' Battle, began in early August, 1862. Jackson's corps was to lead this push. His first objective was to stop Brigadier General John Pope, who was moving toward the important railroad center at Gordonsville, where the Orange and Alexandria joined the Virginia Central. The hope was that Jackson could strike Pope's advance corps under Banks at Culpeper before the latter could get reinforcements. Upon his approach Jackson discovered that Pope had ordered Banks forward to Cedar Mountain, about eight miles south of Culpeper. By noon of August 9, the Federals had two divisions of about 8,000 men at Cedar Mountain with another division coming up in support.¹

Still believing that only the advance units of Pope had reached Culpeper, Jackson pressed forward eagerly. Ewell's division led the march with Early's brigade at the head of the column. Brigadier General Charles S. Winder's division (formerly Jackson's) followed on the heels of Ewell. Winder, pale and sick, had just been formally

¹Johnson & Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 4, 5, 9.

given the command that morning. Taliaferro was his senior brigadier. A. P. Hill's division was several miles back, within easy supporting distance. In all, some 24,000 Confederate troops crossed Robertson River the morning of August 9.² The three brigades under Winder began their march that morning from their camp at Barnett's Ford on the Rapidan River on the turnpike leading to Culpeper. Three miles past the Robertson River, they came upon Ewell's division which had already confronted the enemy near the hills of Cedar Run. Dispositions had already been made, and Ewell's artillery had begun firing. The brigades of Ewell's division had formed on the right. Winder's troops were to form on the left.³ Winder quickly ordered his division up the turnpike to a point at which the woods on the right of the road terminated. Beyond this lay a barren field to the right and a cornfield to the front. Early's brigade, protected by several hills, occupied the right of this bare field. The Confederates formed their line of battle, supposedly opposite the Federal lines, which were on the other side of a cornfield.

Winder now ordered his Second Brigade, under J. M. Garnett, to move forward to the left under cover of the woods to the wheat field. Here the brigade was to extend itself back to the edge of the

²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 22-23.

³Johnson & Bucl, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 4, 5, 9.

woods, Winder ordered his batteries to move up to where the bare field began and to begin firing. Taliaferro was ordered to march parallel to the road in the rear of the batteries and under cover of the woods to a point within supporting distance of the Second Brigade. All of these dispositions were made under heavy Federal artillery fire, thrown at random into the woods. Once the Confederate guns began their effective shelling, the Federal guns slackened their fire.⁴

Upon reaching his designated position, Taliaferro halted the men and awaited further orders. He soon received news that Winder had been shot, and that he was now in command of the First Division. Although second in command, Taliaferro had not been informed of the division operations much beyond the disposition of his own brigade. In his official report of the battle, he stated that " [I was] ignorant of the plans in general, except so far as I could form an opinion from my observations of the dispositions made."⁵ He immediately rode to the front to acquaint himself with the position of Garnett's brigade and to reconnoiter the enemy's position which was obscured by the wheat field in front of the First Virginia Battalion of that brigade. There was no sign of the Federals in front of the wheat

⁴Official Records, XII, part II, 198.

⁵Ibid., p. 189.

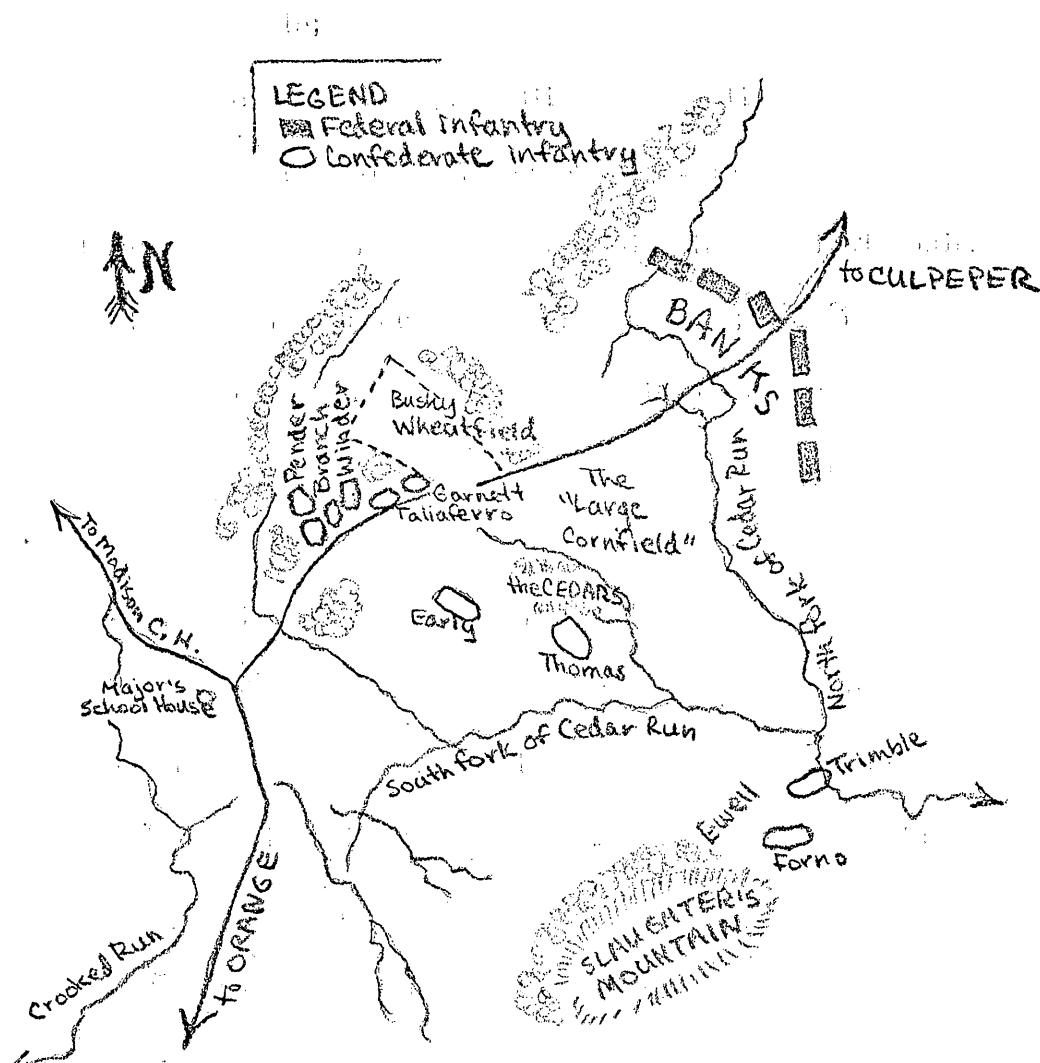
field, but Taliaferro discovered them to the right of this position in the cornfield, partially concealed by the rolling countryside.

Taliaferro had returned to the position of his batteries when he was informed that the Federals were beginning to show themselves in front of the First Virginia, which he had just left. He quickly ordered the Tenth Virginia Infantry regiment of his Third Brigade forward to reinforce the First Virginia battalion and told Colonel J. Roland to rapidly move his First Brigade to support Garnett.

At the same time the Federals began moving through the cornfield. Noticing their advance, Taliaferro ordered Garnett to throw the right wing of his Second Brigade forward to drive them back. He also ordered the Third Brigade, now under Colonel Alexander G. Taliaferro's command,⁶ to move into the open field on the right and drive back the Federals in their front. General Taliaferro commented upon the gallantry of the Twenty-First Virginia Infantry Regiment of the Second Brigade as they poured destructive fire upon the enemy. Taliaferro's brigade also advanced in superb fashion causing the enemy to give way before a severe fire.

But while the battle went well on the right, disaster was impending on the left. Roland's brigade was not near enough to

⁶William B. Taliaferro's Third brigade was now placed under the command of Colonel Alexander G. Taliaferro, a relative. A. G. Taliaferro was senior colonel in the brigade.



Sketch of Battlefield of Cedar Mountain. (Source: Lee's Lieutenants, II, 31. Taken from Hotchkiss' map in Official Records Atlas, Plate LXXXV-4.) This is best map available, but is not entirely satisfactory. It shows positions of the Confederate Brigades after they had been turned by the Federal assault. The Federal forces, however, are shown in the positions held before they charged.

Garnett's Second Brigade; this allowed the Federals to turn the left wing of Garnett. The Second began falling back, slightly disordered, which exposed the left flank of Taliaferro's brigade and caused it, also, to fall back momentarily before regaining its original position. At this critical moment Roland's brigade moved up; almost simultaneously Branch's brigade of Hill's division moved up to engage the Federals. These fresh troops were sufficient to drive back the Federals whose ranks were becoming confused because of the severe conflict with the Second Brigade.⁷

As Taliaferro's brigade advanced to the edge of the hill overlooking the cornfield and Garnett's brigade to the edge of the woods, Ewell threw forward his brigades on the right.⁸ The Federals were driven back from their positions in confusion. To cover their retreat, the enemy cavalry charged against Taliaferro's brigade. But their valor brought no success; caught in a devastating crossfire, they were dispersed with heavy losses. This was the last offensive effort of the Federals, and they began retreating. Taliaferro's division crossed the cornfield diagonally toward the woods on the other side; meanwhile Ewell's troops advanced en échelon. The Confederates continued to drive the Federals back for some three miles until,

⁷Ibid., p. 189.

⁸Ibid., p. 236.

Taliaferro writes, "darkness made further pursuit impossible."⁹

Even with darkness Jackson was determined to make the most of the advantage he had barely won. Hill's fresh troops were ordered to lead the column and drive the Federals back to Culpeper. Although meeting resistance, they continued to press forward. Only the news that a second Federal corps had arrived caused Jackson to order his troops to bivouac. At the end of the day, the Federal losses totaled 2,381, which included some 400 prisoners.¹⁰ In comparison, the Medical Director of the Confederate Army reported a total of 1,276--229 dead, 1047 wounded. Taliaferro's and Garnett's brigades suffered almost half (611) of the casualties.¹¹

Viewed tactically, rather than in terms of casualties, the battle at Cedar Mountain was not really much of a success for Jackson.¹² Jackson should have been able to use his superior numbers to take fuller advantage of Banks' gross recklessness. The initial Federal assault on the Confederate left had been ill prepared and should have been crushed immediately. But this was not the result. Instead, two Confederate brigades had been thrown

⁹Ibid., pp. 189-190.

¹⁰Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 40-43.

¹¹Official Records, XII, part II, 179-180.

¹²Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 44.

into confusion. The reason, of course, lies in the fact that the Confederate left flank had been in the air. Freeman expresses the belief that no initial reconnaissance had been made to the left, although the woods were so thick that surprise might have been expected. He believes that Jackson should have acquainted himself personally with the conditions on an exposed flank that was threatened. As for Taliaferro's share of responsibility, Freeman states that

. . . the change made by that officer in Garnett's line was ordered hurriedly under marked disadvantage. When a senior Brigadier is kept in ignorance of the part the Division is to play in action, how can he be blamed if, on sudden call, he does not follow a plan he does not know. Jackson's reticence--not to say secretiveness--was responsible in part for the rout of his left wing.¹³

The facts connected with this rout seem to relieve Taliaferro of any major responsibility. First, he was ignorant not only of the general plan of attack, but also of the disposition of the brigades themselves. After making a preliminary reconnaissance, he ordered Roland's brigade up in support of Garnett's brigade. In his report following the battle, Taliaferro notes that when he discovered that the left wing of the brigade had been turned, he wondered if perhaps Roland had not received his order.¹⁴ But obviously the order had been received as Roland was surprised when Garnett's brigade began

¹³Ibid., pp. 44-45.

¹⁴Official Records, XII, Part II, 189.

to fall back; he had been under the impression that the right of his brigade had rested on the left of Garnett's.¹⁵

It seems then that Taliaferro, (assuming command of the division with little foreknowledge,) correctly evaluated the situation and ordered the necessary dispositions. Roland's brigade, marching up, was also hampered by the lack of knowledge of the terrain; its commander, moving his troops as ordered, lacked time to place his right on the left of Garnett's brigade.

The Battle of Cedar Mountain decided nothing. Jackson was forced to withdraw because the rest of Pope's forces were coming up to support Banks. As soon as Longstreet's corps could be sent from Richmond, Lee wanted to make another offensive thrust at Pope before McClellan could reinforce him. The plan was to trap Pope between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers.

On the morning of August 20, Taliaferro's division began its maneuvering, crossing the Rapidan River at Somerville Ford, and bivouacking at Stevensburg in Culpeper County. The next morning, Taliaferro's division moved to the front (leading Ewell's and A. P. Hill's), near Brandy Station on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and pushed forward to Cunningham Ford on the Rappahannock

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

River.¹⁶

As Taliaferro's leading brigade approached the ford, it discovered Federals on the other side. The Federal infantry held the edge of a cornfield and a skirt of the woods which approached the river bank and the hills overlooking the ford. Taliaferro halted his troops under cover of some woods and moved his artillery to the front. After a short resistance, the Confederates were able to silence the Federal guns. In the struggle one of the enemy caissons was blown up and their infantry dispersed in confusion.¹⁷ Under the direction of Major-General Stuart, the cavalry reconnoitered. They remained for several hours rounding up prisoners and arms. Upon returning, they told Taliaferro they had discovered the enemy regrouping and moving up large masses along the river. Taliaferro immediately detailed a force of sharpshooters from the Third Brigade to hold the river bank.

Skirmishing continued for the rest of the day. Toward night the Federal skirmishers were reinforced by a brigade of infantry. The Confederates answered this move by opening up with their artillery until darkness fell.

On the following morning, August 22, Taliaferro was ordered

¹⁶Johnson and Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 501-511.

¹⁷Official Records, XII, Part ii, 654.

to hold his position as Ewell's and Hill's troops passed on his left toward Farley Ford on the Hazel River. Taliaferro was to follow. That morning he engaged in what he described as a "warm artillery duel" with the Federals which, according to published reports, resulted in a considerable slaughter to the enemy. The Federals suffered losses about 20 to 1 compared to the Confederates. He then moved on to Farley Ford, passing the other divisions who made way for him. By the time he reached the ford, Trimble and John B. Hood's brigades had already engaged the Federals and had driven them back. Lee ordered Taliaferro to remain at the ford until morning and, together with Hood, repress any further enemy demonstrations. No further advances were made by the Federals on the 23rd, and Taliaferro's men proceeded to Scott's farm near White Sulphur Springs.¹⁸

Meanwhile, back at Lee's headquarters, more important events had occurred. Stuart had raided Pope's headquarters and had seized a miscellaneous mass of Pope's military papers, including a dispatch book. Lee examined the papers carefully. They confirmed his suspicions that Pope was the stronger. McClellan's reinforcements would make the odds hopeless. Pope had already managed to avoid being trapped between the rivers. Lee still had to find some way to

¹⁸Ibid., p. 655.

attack Pope before Federal reinforcements arrived, but he was unable to cross the Rappahannock because of Pope's defensive actions. Lee desired to avoid any general engagements if possible. A war of maneuver was the only way the Confederates could succeed. After an unsuccessful attempt to sweep Pope's left flank, Lee decided to send Jackson's corps, of about 23,000, around Pope's right.¹⁹

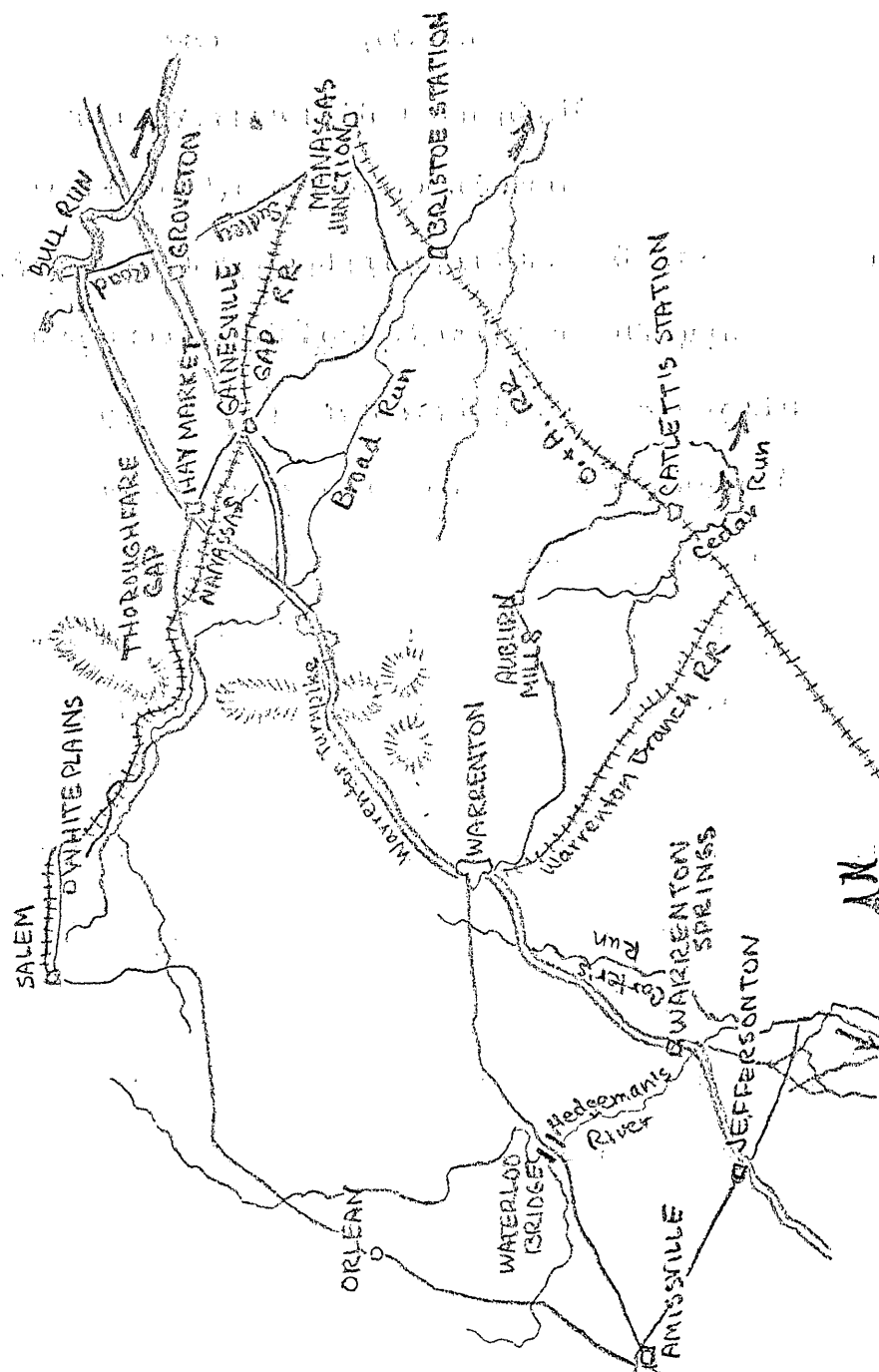
Following Lee's orders, Taliaferro's men moved out on August 24. They pushed forward to within one mile of Jeffersonton. The next day, still in the rear, they crossed the ford above Waterloo, marched 26 miles, and bivouacked near Salem. Only Jackson knew that their objective was to cut Pope's communications. The orders to the division chiefs were simply, "march to a cross-road; a staff officer there will inform you which fork to take; and so on to the next fork, where you will find a courier with a sealed direction pointing out the road."²⁰ Taliaferro notes that this extreme reticence was very uncomfortable and often annoyed Jackson's subordinates as it was sometimes carried too far. But it was, he concedes, the real secret of Jackson's reputation.²¹

They resumed their march the next day, August 26, this time

¹⁹Freeman, R. E. Lee, II, 289-303.

²⁰Johnson & Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 501.

²¹Ibid., p. 502.



Sketch of the terrain of Jackson's march to cut Pope's line of supply, August 24-28, 1862. (Source: Lee's Lieutenants, II, 86.)

at right angles to the direction of the preceding day toward Bull Run Mountains. By the time the three divisions reached Gainesville, several cavalry brigades under Stuart's direction had caught up with them. All of Jackson's subsequent movements were greatly aided by the skillful employment of the cavalry.²² Pouring through Thoroughfare Gap onto the plains extending to Manassas Junction, they marched to within a mile of Bristoe Station on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The adjacent cornfields supplemented their scanty rations.

At Bristoe Station they stopped two Federal trains, although another managed to avoid capture. Jackson now moved north along the railroad to Manassas Junction, where there was a vast depot of quartermaster's commissary and ordnance stores. Taliaferro's First Brigade, under Colonel William Baylor, was ordered to lead via a country road to Manassas Junction. Baylor encountered a force of enemy cavalry about a mile from the Junction, but easily dispersed them. He then pushed beyond, into the Junction.²³ The Federals were not taken by surprise, but their force was too small and they were quickly defeated. For the price of fifteen wounded, the Confederates captured immense stores, eight pieces of artillery and 300 prisoners. A counter attack was beaten back; 200 more prisoners and

²²Ibid., p. 502.

²³Official Records, XII, Part II, 655-656.

the train which had transported them from Alexandria were taken during the flight.

Taliaferro assumed command at Manassas Junction. He had the railroad bridge over Bull Run River. This completed the severing of all communications with Alexandria. Furthermore, he established the necessary pickets to prevent any surprise attack, made preparations to transport the captured supplies, distributed some of the food to the troops, and then made preparations to fire the remaining stores.²⁴

Thus far Jackson's actions were nothing more than those of a raiding party. His purpose of attacking Pope and holding him until Longstreet's corps could come up from behind and crush him had not yet been accomplished. Several problems, as Taliaferro recalls in his article, confronted Jackson: (1) it was necessary to place his forces on one of Pope's flanks to protect himself if Longstreet's men were late in arriving; (2) at the same time, Jackson had to be able to strike effectively at Pope; (3) he had to remain near Longstreet in case quick reconcentration became necessary; (4) if Longstreet were unable to reach him, Jackson would have to be in a position either to remove the obstacles in Longstreet's path or to withdraw his troops

²⁴Ibid., p. 656.

safely.²⁵ The point that seemed to best satisfy these requirements was west of Bull Run River and north of the Warrenton turnpike.

That night, August 27, Jackson began making the necessary dispositions. He had allowed the men leisure time that day. Certain that his flanks had been so well guarded that the enemy was uncertain, if not unaware, of his position, Jackson could afford to rest his men. A. P. Hill's division was instructed to march to Centerville; Ewell's division was to cross Bull Run River at Blackburn's Ford and move upstream to the stone bridge.²⁶ Taliaferro's division was to move down to the Warrenton and Alexandria Turnpike via an old country road to Sudley Mill. At daybreak on August 28, Taliaferro's division had reached the battlefield of First Manassas. Taliaferro threw forward his Second Brigade, under Colonel Bradley T. Johnson, to Groveton. The Third Brigade, under Colonel Taliaferro, was positioned at Sudley Mill, while the First and Fourth Brigades were stationed about a half mile beyond the Turnpike and Aldie Road.²⁷

As usual, Jackson's marching orders revealed very little of his plans. Freeman states:

Nobody knew where they had marched or when or why. . . .

²⁵ Johnson and Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 505.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 505.

²⁷ Official Records, XII, Part II, 656.

There was, in short, worse confusion than had prevailed on any of Jackson's marches save that of August 8, en route to meet Pope at Cedar Mountain.²⁸

Before the scattered divisions could be regrouped, the Federals made contact with some of Taliaferro's troops. Mistaking Hill's march to Centerville for that of Jackson's entire corps, the Federals had been ordered to concentrate at Manassas to pursue.²⁹ The initial Federal demonstrations were checked by the Second Brigade who were picketing the Warrenton road toward Gainesville. A captured messenger informed Colonel Johnson that the Federals were planning to cross Bull Run at the stone bridge and at Sudley's Ford.³⁰ When the news reached Jackson, he ordered Taliaferro to "move your division and attack the enemy." Ewell was to follow and "support the attack."³¹ If the available forces could resist the opening Federal onslaught, Jackson would be able to reunite his scattered forces and strike a decisive blow at Pope.

Taliaferro's troops marched through the woods to attack the Federal left flank as it advanced toward Sudley from the direction of Gainesville. Pushing forward with the First, Third and Fourth Brigades, Taliaferro discovered the Federals had abandoned their

²⁸Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 104.

²⁹Johnson and Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 507.

³⁰Official Records, XII, Part II, 656.

³¹Johnson and Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders, II, 508.

original intentions of concentrating at Manassas. Instead he found the enemy moving off to the right of the Warrenton turnpike. The Federals had run into Johnson's pickets, and mistaking them for a reconnoitering party, had turned westward. Taliaferro immediately threw forward his troops, followed by Ewell, in the direction of the turnpike. Battle lines formed, parallel to the road.

In short order, the Federal skirmishers advanced and were almost immediately supported by a large force which crossed the turnpike and advanced toward the Confederate lines. Taliaferro deployed Baylor's brigade on the extreme right with the Fourth Brigade next to it. Johnson's brigade was still some distance to the left, at the outbreak of the fighting, having recently been withdrawn from its position at Groveton. Taliaferro's brigade did not arrive until after the action had commenced; it was immediately moved to support the batteries on the right and subsequently moved to the right of Baylor.³² The batteries were placed in position in front of the Fourth Brigade just above the village of Groveton. From their vantage point they poured a destructive fire upon the advancing Federal forces. Then, under heavy fire, they moved to the right of the First Brigade where they were able to infiltrate the Federal artillery and drive the guns from the field.

³²Official Records, XII, Part II, 656.

By this time both lines stood in the open fields. The Confederate troops, relates Taliaferro, moved forward across the field with splendid gallantry and in perfect order. Twice they advanced to the farm house and orchard on their right while the Federals held part of the orchard and turnpike with superior forces. For two and a half hours, both lines stood solidly, unflinching at the deadly exchange of minie balls, bayonets, and fists. It was a bitterly contested stand up fight. Finally, about nine o'clock that night, the Federals slowly and reluctantly fell back and yielded the field.³³

As Freeman states, the struggle taught nothing tactically, it merely demonstrated the obstinacy of both forces.³⁴ The gallantry and heroism displayed by the Confederate troops was, in Taliaferro's words, "beyond praise." In his report he lists the actions of his own troops: Baylor's brigade, the most exposed, sustained the reputation of the "Stonewall Brigade" it had gained some twelve months previously; Johnson's brigade, having had picket duty the night before and having been involved in the early skirmishes, was kept in reserve; Taliaferro's brigade advanced under severe fire and succeeded in driving the Federals from their position

³³Ibid., p. 657.

³⁴Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 109.

in the orchard and on the turnpike; the Fourth also performed splendidly.³⁵ Taliaferro, himself, received praise from Jackson for his individual performance in a fight which was "fierce and sanguinary."³⁶

The loss was heavy on both sides; Taliaferro's division had almost one third of its men killed or wounded. Its fighting force had trimmed to a little over 400 men--barely the size of a moderately strong brigade.³⁷ Furthermore, its command was greatly weakened.³⁸ One of the more serious casualties was Taliaferro. Shot in the neck, in the arm, and in the foot, he maintained his command until the battle ended,³⁹ but was forced to return to Richmond, where he was to remain convalescing until December.

By December 12, Taliaferro had returned to his command.⁴⁰ In the meantime Lee had moved into Maryland after defeating Pope

³⁵Official Records, XII, Part II, 657.

³⁶Ibid., p. 645.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 661-664.

³⁸Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 109.

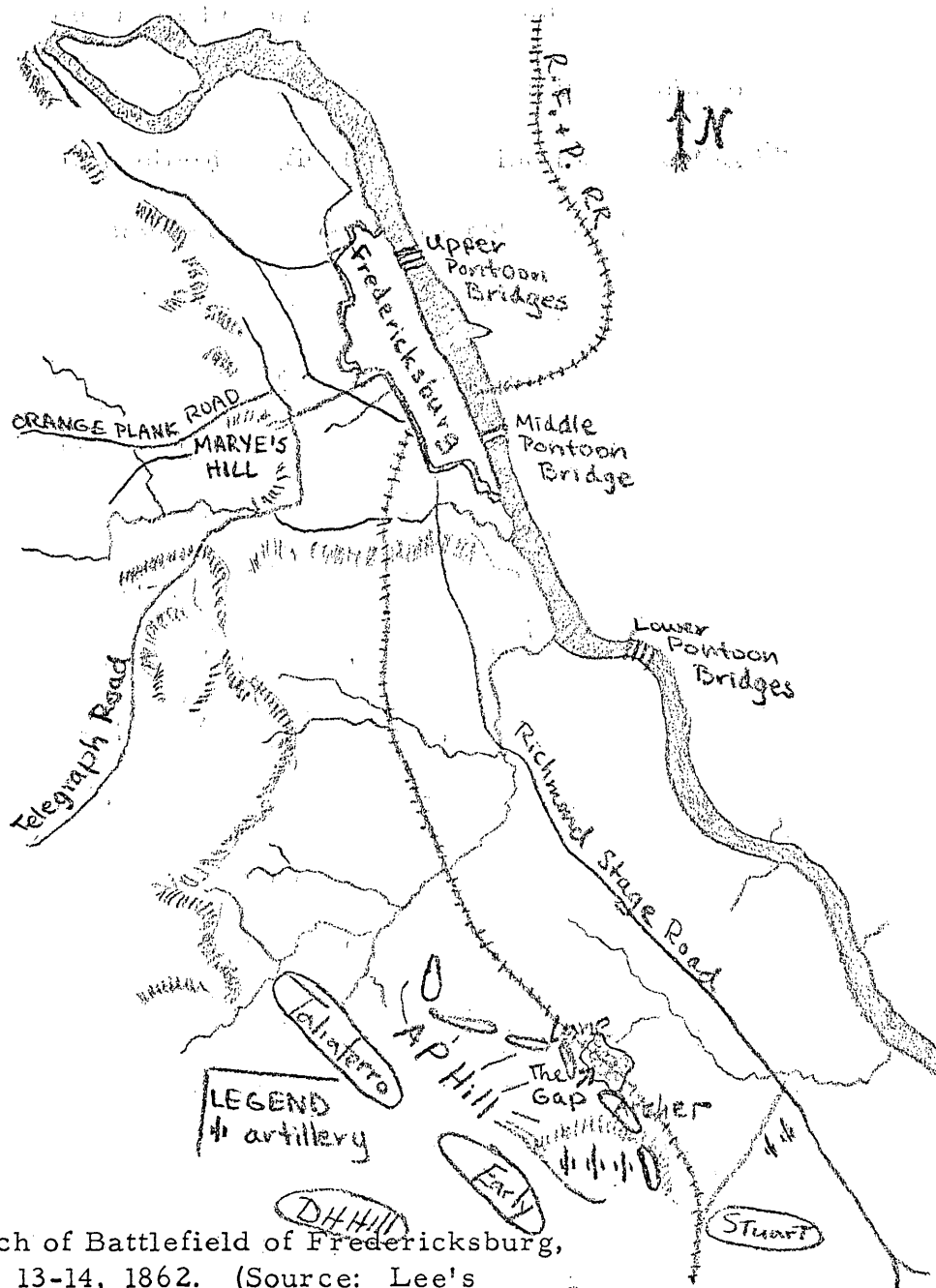
³⁹Official Records, XII, Part II, 658.

⁴⁰The exact date is uncertain. On November 28, Lee reports W. B. Taliaferro to be still absent. As late as December 9, Mrs. W. B. Taliaferro records in her diary of visiting W. B. Taliaferro in Richmond.

at Second Manassas. Escaping a close call at the Battle of Sharpsburg in September, the tattered Confederate troops withdrew back into Virginia. The campaign of the past few months had been difficult. Crossing back over the Potomac into Virginia, Lee's force was not the same trim, well-oiled fighting machine that had left Richmond. Supplies were scarce if not nonexistent. The men themselves were suffering from fatigue. Fortunately the Federals did not press their advantage. By the time they did, most of the deficiencies in Lee's army had been corrected. The Federals were threatening once again by the time Taliaferro had recovered from his wounds and had returned to Lee. The Federal plan was for Ambrose E. Burnside to attack Fredericksburg, where the Confederates had begun regrouping their forces and supplies. Outnumbered eight to five (125,000 under Burnside; 78,000 under Lee), the Confederates still had ample reserves due to their strong defensive position. On December 11, Burnside began laying bridges over the Rappahannock.

The following morning, Taliaferro, again acting as a division commander, received orders to march his troops north from Guiney's Station to Hamilton's Crossing. At this point, they joined A. P. Hill's division which was already in battle order.⁴¹ Taliaferro formed his

⁴¹ Longstreet's corps commanded the Confederate left flank. Hood's division (Longstreet's corps) protecting the center of the line, acted as liaison with Jackson's corps. Jackson placed A. P. Hill's division on the line, holding Taliaferro, D. H. Hill, and Early in reserve.



Sketch of Battlefield of Fredericksburg,
Dec. 13-14, 1862. (Source: Lee's
Lieutenants, II, 331.) Shows original dispositions of
Confederate forces. Federals penetrated area labeled
"The Gap" between brigades of Archer and Lane.

troops on the railroad to Hill's right. Subsequently, he was ordered to move his command to the rear and left of Hill's line. The mere fact that Taliaferro's division (Jackson's old division) which had had its rank thinned by continual severe front line service, was placed in the rear, demonstrates that Lee had sufficient reserves for a change. He then proceeded to station E. Frank Faxton's and William E. Starke's brigades in Hill's rear, holding his other two brigades in reserve.⁴² His artillery was placed to the left of the division. When all arrangements had been completed, Taliaferro notified Hill of the various positions. Much to A. P. Hill's satisfaction, all of Taliaferro's brigade and battery commanders had been ordered to recognize any demands for support without the need of orders from their immediate superiors.

Early the next morning, December 13, Taliaferro posted two of his batteries in the field across the railroad to the right of Bernard's quarters. One battery and two pieces of another battery were placed on the hill just left of the railroad. The other pieces protected the extreme right flank of the Confederate forces. About 9 A. M., the Federals began advancing toward Jackson's position on the right of the Confederate line. The Confederate batteries immediately opened with such a destructive fire that the Federal lines

⁴²Official Records, XXI, 675.

wavered and broke. The Federal artillery now began concentrating such a heavy fire on the Confederate batteries that they forced the Confederate artillery to retire to the rear, behind the railroad, after two hours of action. Under cover of this support, the enemy infantry again began to advance toward A. P. Hill's line. Taliaferro ordered his infantry to advance to the military road; although exposed to the heavy Federal shelling they would be within easy supporting distance of Hill's line. His troops moved, Taliaferro relates, in compliance with their orders with "perfect steadiness and enthusiasm."

Paxton, commanding the First Brigade of Taliaferro's division, discovered that some of the Confederate troops were falling back to the right of Marcy Gregg's brigade. The enemy was advancing with two regiments beyond the front line through a gap which fronted a boggy wood--supposedly inaccessible to them. Paxton immediately moved his brigade to the right to engage the penetrating Federal forces. By the time they reached that area, the Federals were already retiring under the furdous counterattack of Brigadier General Jubal A. Early's men. Paxton continued to push forward to the front and for the rest of the day his men occupied that place in the front line. The main effort of the enemy that day had been on the Confederate left. Fourteen times the Federals attempted to take Marye's Hill. Fourteen times their unsuccessful charges met with disaster. Finally, by 7 P. M., the assaults stopped.

The other brigades of Taliaferro's division were held in reserve until the morning of December 14. At that time, they relieved A. P. Hill's troops at the front. Starke was placed to the left of the railroad; Jones, Taliaferro, and Paxton occupying the railroad and connecting with Early's troops on the right.⁴³ At daybreak the Federals made a slight demonstration on Taliaferro's left; their skirmishers advanced almost to the railroad, but were easily driven back. By mid-day the skirmishing, which at times had been brisk, ceased.

D. H. Hill's division relieved Taliaferro the next morning. Taliaferro's men moved back to Mine road where once again they could relax.⁴⁴ Later that day Burnside began withdrawing from Fredericksburg. He had suffered 12,600 casualties. Lee's forces had sustained 5,600 casualties, but most were only slightly wounded. The withdrawal of Burnside marked the end of the 1862 Virginia campaigns--campaigns which on the whole could be registered as Confederate successes. But the price of success came high. Many men had been lost, men who could no longer be readily replaced. Casualties had also caused a general depletion in the ranks of the officers. Between Cedar Mountain and Sharpsburg, Winder and

⁴³Ibid., p. 676.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 676.

Garland had died. Ewell, Taliaferro, Trimble and Field had all been wounded. At Sharpsburg the casualties had been numerous. Three generals (G. B. Anderson, W. E. Starke, and L. O'Brien Branch) had been killed; five generals (Richard H. Anderson, Robert Toombs, Ambrose R. Wright, R. S. Ripley, and Alexander Lawton) had been wounded. Below the brigade level, the casualties had been even greater. The nine divisions were headed by four major-generals, four brigadier generals and one colonel; the forty-three brigades were led by seventeen brigadier generals and twenty-six men with the rank of colonel or lower.⁴⁵

Lee could scarcely afford to allow his army to operate under conditions of temporary command. He had attempted to alleviate this condition by submitting a list of new promotions in October, but had not been entirely successful in achieving his requests because of President Davis's strict interpretation of the military law. Davis would not promote officers who were physically disabled. This meant, for one thing, deferring the promotion of Brigadier General L. R. Trimble.⁴⁶ Lee avoided this rule by having him appointed to command an unspecified division under Jackson. There was no recorded opposition to either the device used by Lee or to the promotions

⁴⁵Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 250-254.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 264-265, 413-414.

themselves--none except by Brigadier General William B. Taliaferro. As senior brigadier in Jackson's division, he believed that he should have the divisional command. The early months of 1863 saw Taliaferro attempting to secure this promotion. For Taliaferro it was either the promotion or a transfer to another theatre.

CHAPTER V

A VIRGINIA ARISTOCRAT TO THE END

Taliaferro was quite disturbed when Trimble was officially given command of Jackson's division.¹ As already noted, Taliaferro was determined to secure a transfer if he was not named to command the division. He was the ranking brigadier of the division and had been in command of it since Winder's death, except for the two months he spent recuperating from his wounds. By all rights he should not have been passed over for promotion--the coveted rank of Major-General should have been his. Trimble's promotion confirmed Taliaferro's latent suspicions that Jackson had never completely forgiven him for his part in the Romney episode.

In reviewing Taliaferro's career for the twenty months, the Romney incident shows up as the only black mark against his professional reputation. From an examination of the evidence surrounding the protest, it appears that Taliaferro and the other officers were justified in their demand for better conditions for their men. But the manner which they employed to achieve these aims was

¹Official Records, XXI, 1009. The formal appointments were not made until April 23, 1863 when Congress convened, but the commissions were dated from January 17, 1863. Trimble's was announced January 19, 1863.

certainly not justified. The petition to Loring was in accordance with proper military procedure, although the wording was a bit strong. But by this time the damage had been done. Already the politicians in Richmond had word of the demoralized conditions existing within the ranks. Taliaferro and the other officers had gone over Jackson's authority without Jackson's knowledge. Taliaferro's action cannot be condoned in this case.

Other than this episode, Taliaferro's career stands up well under critical evaluation. He was certainly no physical coward. Wounded seriously at the Battle of Groveton (August 28, 1862), he remained on the field commanding his men until the fighting subsided. The previous year, at the Battle of Greenbrier River (October 3, 1861), he had been commended for his gallantry and the inspiration he provided his men.

Taliaferro displayed considerable tactical skill. Only at Cedar Mountain (August 9, 1862) had his troops suffered from faulty deployment. On that occasion the left flank of the First Brigade was turned because of a gap between it and the Second Brigade. But in examining the circumstances surrounding this temporary setback,² Taliaferro can not be held responsible for the development of the conditions which momentarily placed his troops in that precarious

²See supra, Chapter III.

situation. On the whole he handled his men well. Several of the engagements he participated in were of little tactical importance; they were merely knock-down, drag-out fights. Under these conditions of close combat and heavy fire, Taliaferro always managed to retain order amongst his troops, who performed well under these difficult conditions.

Much of the Confederate strategy involved marching, continually attempting to flank the more numerous foe. More often than not on these marches, it was Taliaferro's command--first his regiment, then his brigade and finally his division--that was the vanguard of the Confederate Army. And if he was not leading, Taliaferro seemed to be guarding the rear--continually fighting holding and delaying rearguard actions. Only twice during his twenty months in Virginia was his command reported in unsatisfactory condition. Both times, organization had broken down under adverse circumstances. The first incident occurred following the two week trek after Garnett's defeat at Rich Mountain. The relatively inexperienced troops had undergone a grueling experience; their commander had been killed early in the retreat and the new commanding officer was incapacitated by illness. Finally Taliaferro was given command. He successfully brought the tattered forces to safety.³ This same force, still not

³Although Taliaferro's men escaped, Lt. Colonel John Pegram's command of 553 was captured. The other units must have had some 100

completely recovered, then underwent the tortuous Romney campaign where disorganization and demoralization again set in. In both instances the troops had faced adverse conditions. Hiking many long, tedious miles without proper camp equipment or adequate food, and with nature not at her kindest, it is easy to understand why discipline became lax. Taliaferro had little control over these outside forces. In both cases, as soon as the adverse conditions were alleviated, Taliaferro quickly restored his command to its peak efficiency.

On the whole, Taliaferro displayed the ability to command. He successfully managed Jackson's division for several months. Despite his ability, it appeared that Jackson had passed him over for promotion. The reason must lie with the attitude Taliaferro displayed during the entire Romney affair.

In January, 1863, while awaiting official word of the new promotions, Taliaferro became involved in another controversy, this time with Brigadier-General Frank Paxton. Hostilities between the two began over a minor question of military etiquette--whether or not court-martial proceedings should be forwarded through channels and whether the division commander had the right to open a sealed packet of court documents. Tempers flared. The

or more wounded and stragglers. Taliaferro's Twenty-Third only lost 32. (See Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 23-27, note 36.)

alleged charges soon reached Army Headquarters.⁴ Lee examined the case; his findings supported Taliaferro's position.⁵

The controversy had been decided in Taliaferro's favor, but the denial of his promotion annoyed him. When he learned that Trimble's promotion was official, he decided to apply for a transfer.⁶ His motives seem clear: "the continual denial of a Major General's commission was an affront to his station as a landed aristocrat and a gentleman politician."⁷ On January 30 he wrote to his commanding general asking to be relieved of his command. In urging his transfer Taliaferro said:

I sincerely trust that the Comdg Genl will recognize and appreciate the delicacy of sentiment which influences me to urge that he will not insist that after occupying the position of a Division Commander for so long a time I will be required to assume a subordinate position in the same division.⁸

⁴Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall, pp. 443-444; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 504-505, citing Paxton, Elisha Franklin Paxton Memoir and Memorial, pp. 83-84.

⁵Letter to Lt. General Jackson from General Lee, January 12, 1862, Taliaferro Papers.

⁶Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 417.

⁷Ibid., 505.

⁸Letter to Brigadier General R. H. Chilton, Headquarters, Jackson's Division, from William B. Taliaferro, January 30, 1863, Taliaferro Papers.

Taliaferro's request was approved; he was transferred to duty in the southeastern states. Jackson made no comment about Taliaferro's transfer--but his opinion can be inferred by his failure to recommend Taliaferro for promotion. So ended Taliaferro's service for the Confederacy in Virginia.

In February 1863, Taliaferro reported to P. G. T. Beauregard who assigned him to command the defenses of Savannah and the adjoining coast. He was recalled in July to command Battery Wagner (on Morris Island, protecting Charleston, South Carolina). After being bombarded heavily for an entire day--July 18--Taliaferro, with less than 1200 men, was able to repulse the attack of some 6000 Federals.⁹ Afterwards he was in command of James Island, another defense of Charleston. For a brief time in 1864 he had a quasi-independent command in Florida, but by April he was again in command at James Island. By December 1864, the Federals under Sherman's guidance had pushed through Georgia to the coast. During the siege of Savannah, Taliaferro commanded the troops covering its evacuation. Taliaferro commanded a division of Hardee's corps in Johnston's army during March and April, 1865. In their engagements against the Federals in March,

⁹Official Records, XXVIII, Part 1, 415-421. Williams, Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray, has an excellent description of the entire Federal assault on the Confederate defenses, pp. 209-244.

the Confederates were continually pushed northward through North Carolina. Finally, on April 25, the day before Johnston's surrender, Taliaferro was promoted to Major General.¹⁰

A year earlier, James A. Seddon, then Secretary of War, had stated, "of his [Taliaferro's] gallantry and tried determination on the field there can be no doubt, and his general capacity is, in my judgment, fully equal to most of our major generals whom I have met."¹¹ Taliaferro's promotion had been delayed at that time for several reasons. First, openings were on the whole scarce in the southeastern area where military activity was much more limited than in the battle-scarred Virginia theatre. And when vacancies occurred, preference was given to the officers from the immediate vicinity; this was just another example of the strong sectionalism existing in the South. Another reason involved Seddon himself. He was a relative and good friend of Taliaferro's. This meant using extreme delicacy in pressing Taliaferro's promotion lest charges of favoritism cloud Seddon's record.¹²

After the war, Taliaferro returned home where he continued

¹⁰Letter to William B. Taliaferro from John C. Breckinridge, Secretary of War, April 25, 1865, Taliaferro Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

¹¹Official Records, XXXV, Part 1, 622-623.

¹²Ibid.

to help lead Virginia in her new life. He realized that the outcome of the war had changed the Southern way of life. His ideals, though never surrendered, became pliable, adapting to the new life.¹³

As a member of the state legislature (1874-1879), Taliaferro opposed the repudiation of Virginia's state debt. He believed that Virginia, and the rest of the South, should accept defeat gracefully and become an integral part of the new Union. In 1880 he ran unsuccessfully for governor of Virginia. The remainder of his life centered around his law practice, although he continued to be active in public life. He was Grand Master of Masons of Virginia from 1876 to 1877. He was a member of the board of visitors of several state institutions, including William and Mary (1870-1897) and V. M. I., and also served as Judge of Gloucester County Court from 1891 to 1897. Until his death, the many distinguished visitors to his ancestral home Dunham Massie saw an old Confederate battleflag draped in the main hallway, a tribute to a lost cause.¹⁴

¹³Taliaferro's recollections of the war, Taliaferro Papers.

¹⁴Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII, 284.

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